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BEADLE'S

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POCKET NOVELS



Boone, the Hunter.



BOVE THE HILL

THE HILL

THE HILL

THE HILL

THE HILL

BE

BOONE. THE HUNTER;

OR,

THE BACKWOODS BELLE.

· A ROMANCE OF EARLY LIFE IN VIRGINIA.

BY FREDERICK WHITTAKER,

AUTHOR OF POCKET NOVEL No. 121, "BLACK NICK."

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BOONE, THE HUNTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE OLD HOMESTEAD.

THERE are few dwellings on the face of the earth that speak more of peace, comfort, plenty, and open-handed hospitality, than the true old Southern homestead of Virginia and the Carolinas. In such a scene our story opens, more than a hundred years ago.

In the spring of 1769, the McArdle homestead, in the valley of the Yadkin, under the shadow of old Grandfather Mountain, presented just such a picture of perfect content. A weary traveler, pausing at the roadside to look at the old farm, might have lingered for hours, unrebuked, unless, as is more probable, some one had asked him in to partake of the plenty that reigned within its boundary.

First in view was the house, long and low, stretching out here and there and everywhere, with projections, recesses, wings and angles, out-houses, lean-to offices, covered galleries to kitchen and smoke-house. Around the original log-shanty of the first McArdle had clustered all these additions, in the course of time, as caprice and convenience dictated to son and grandson, till the log-house itself was almost hidden.

Then, between the house and the road, stood the huge old water elm, with its drooping foliage, that marked the site of the cold deep spring that supplied the farm and house. That spring welled up from the ground in a miniature torrent, and rushed brawling away down the valley to join the broad Yadkin, a mile below the homestead.

Now, in the early morning, the cows were trooping out of the generous looking barn-yard, lowing their contentedness to one another, while crowds of cackling chickens went roaming over the nearest plowed field, scratching for

the early worm, and a black flock of turkeys stalked solemnly off into the woods, back of the homestead, to hunt for berries.

Several thoroughbred mares and colts trotted out after the cows, and a whole pack of splendid hounds were scattered about the place, all of them sleek and well-fed.

Plenty and profusion, if not careless prodigality, were apparent in every feature of the place, and revealed the character of its master as plainly as words.

That master, booted and spurred for his morning ride, was standing by the door of the homestead with a friend, waiting for his horse, and laughing at the antics of a number of half-naked children of all colors, from jet to whitey-brown, tumbling about in the sunshine, all as fat as pigs.

Adult negroes, of both sexes, were plenty on the McArdle place. Seven or eight were in sight, bustling in and out of kitchen and smoke-house, fetching and carrying, scolding the children, driving the animals. But, as usual on a Southern farm, where fifty hands were nominally available, it was hard to get any thing done, except by coaxing and bullying alternately.

Now Bryan McArdle was too lazy to do either at most times, though the Scotch blood of his ancestors sometimes boiled up, and caused the blacks to warn each other.

"Golly, Sam, you jess better look out. Ole marse heap mad to-day, flyin' roun' like to tear his shirt."

As he stood by his own door, hale and handsome, in his gray homespun suit, Bryan McArdle, with his two hundred pounds of solid Southern flesh, was a great contrast to his guest and friend, who stood beside him.

Captain the Hon. Augustus Yelverton, on leave of absence from his Majesty's Horse Guards Blue, was a maccaroni of the first water, one of those who flourished in the middle of the eighteenth century, before dandies, bucks, and swells were invented. How such an exquisite gentleman ever came in the barbarous colony of Carolina was a mystery to many of the simple planters; but there he was, domesticated on the McArdle homestead, with an apparent readiness to stay any length of time. Fourteen trunks had Capt. Yelverton for his personal baggage, and the quantity of laced coats,

silk stockings, gold buckles, and jeweled swords that reposed in those trunks no one in the country knew. The attraction which kept such a brilliant gentleman on a quiet farm was supposed to be one thing by some, another by others.

It is certain that Annie McArdle was a lovely girl, and that the captain affected her society greatly. It is equally certain that the girl herself did not seem to affect the captain.

It is certain that the homestead was the finest farm in the Yadkin valley, and well worth a man's marrying its heiress. But the Hon. Augustus frequently declared that this country life was no way for a man of parts and spirit to spend his time.

Somehow or other, despite his protestations, the captain staid on, and had already nearly completed a year at the homestead, where he certainly had a snug berth and nothing to pay, horses in plenty to ride, and of the best.

This morning the gallant officer was equipped for a ride, with a gold-laced suit of handsome French velvet, and boots of the japanned leather lately introduced. The captain wore his own hair, but in the latest style, the fashion set by the fighting king of Prussia, with a pigtail a yard long. He flicked the dust off his boots with a gold-handled whip, and kept his keen, restless black eyes roving here, there and everywhere over the farm-yard, as if he was the owner himself.

"What the deuce ails all the lazy niggers this morning?" said the planter, half laughingly. "Here we've been waiting for those horses ten minutes and never a sign that any one cares."

"Will you permit me, sir, to try my hand at summoning the knaves?" asked the captain, in his soft, silky tones. "All that they want, it seemeth, is a little judicious severity. Odds life, Mr. McArdle, I would bring them to their milk in a week."

"Not the McArdle niggers, Yelverton. There is a kind of ingrained obstinacy in the impudent scamps that would rout your best intentions. By the powers, sir, I *can not* keep a straight face with them, do what I will."

"Odds life, sir, I can. We want our horses, and you own yourself that you can not get them. Now you shall see how I'll get them for you."

The captain's face was delicate and clearly cut, but it wore a very evil smile as he stepped down into the yard among the children, cutting, carelessly but viciously, right and left among their naked bodies. He seemed to possess one of those callous natures that delights in tortures, for he only laughed at the howls of the poor children as they scrambled out of the way.

He passed through the farm-yard gate, and entered the long row of stone stables under the barn, where he found a young negro lad just preparing to lead out two magnificent horses.

"What mean's this?" asked the captain, icily, drawing the lash of his whip through his fingers, and smiling so as to show his teeth. "Dost thou know those horses were ordered twenty minutes ago, Master Pompey?"

"Oh, de laws, no, marse cappen. I war only two, t'ree minute, and I done gone clean bof de bosses, sah, and den—"

"Liar," said the captain, smilingly. "What a fool you are to lie, Master Pompey, when you know what a whip I carry."

And as he spoke he caught the lad by the collar, and gave him a most cruel thrashing, touching up all the tender places with the ingenuity of an old overseer, and causing Pompey to howl for mercy which he did not receive.

Not till the lad writhed down on his knees and thence on his side on the ground, did the captain stop, and then he pointed to the frightened horses, who had backed away to the end of the stable, and said:

"Stop your howling and get up. I'll give you ten times as bad every time you dawdle over your business. Fetch the horses round at once."

And Captain Yelverton sauntered smilingly out into the sunshine, and rejoined his host with an air of virtuous modesty, observing:

"You won't have so long to wait, to-morrow, for your horses, I doubt. A little whalebone and whip-cord go a great way."

Bryan McArdle looked grave a moment, and a cloud came over his good-natured face.

"Have you been striking my servant, Captain Yelverton?" he asked.

"I have but refreshed his memory," said the guardsman,

carelessly. "Odds life, Mac, do you suppose a gentleman in the king's service was made to be fooled by a pack of niggers? I tell thee, no. See, here come thy horses—or mine, I should say, since I won them fairly yesternight. I told thee I'd stir them up."

And up came Pompey, with a sober face, leading the two horses, and nervously eying the whip in the captain's hands. Bryan McArdle was somewhat graver than his wont, but he said nothing more, and slowly mounted the horse Pompey held for him. As he took up the reins, however, he extricated a bright shilling from his pocket, and dropped it in the groom's hat with a kind smile, as if to compensate him for the beating he had received. Pompey's face instantly became a full moon.

Captain Yelverton mounted his own horse, a thoroughbred, exactly matched with that of his host, and bestowed one of his soft, amiable smiles, with the teeth well displayed, to Pompey, as he said:

"You'll wait for us when we come back, Pompey, won't you? You know I don't like to be kept waiting for some one to take my horse. You understand?"

And Pompey rolled up the whites of his eyes and answered, "Yes, marse cappen, I'se shuah to be dar."

Yelverton dealt his horse a cut with the whip, for it seemed it was a necessity to him to outrage something, and away flew both thoroughbreds at speed, the one smarting under the indignity of a blow, the other wild for a race.

It was not till both were far away among the dirt roads, and had taken a breathing gallop up the side of Old Grandfather, that they were able to pull up the foaming horses, fresh from the stable, and rendered furious by the one undeserved blow.

Then McArdle addressed Yelverton for the first time, saying:

"Now, Captain Yelverton, we are alone. May I ask what is the proposition you wish to make to me?"

"I have no proposition, Mac," said the other, smiling. "Odds life, man, you mistake. 'Tis from you the proposition should come, if you wish to keep your farm. Odds life, man, you can not say I have played aught foul with you, and the

homestead is mine. I have told you before, and I say it again, I am not a hard man, and if Mistress Annie will have me, I am content to let you stay with us as reputed owner. But, odds life, man, don't put it in the light of a proposition from me."

And the Hon. Augustus smiled, and showed his teeth like an amiable tiger.

CHAPTER II.

THE LOVERS.

Soon after the planter and his guest had left the place, a young girl, simply dressed in homespun, emerged from the McArdle house, tying on a broad straw hat as she came, and sauntered through the farm-yard gate. She crossed the yard and mounted a stile on the other side, from whence a narrow footpath ran through the fields into a grove of old oaks that grew into a corner of the pasture.

As she tripped along the path, several colts and mares ran whinnying up to her, and each received a kind word or a caress from their young mistress; for Annie McArdle it was, bright and fresh as the morning itself, beloved by every living thing on the farm, who was out for a walk that day.

Annie was a pretty girl, with pleasant gray eyes, and brown curls undisfigured by powder. Although she wore homespun, like every one else in the colony, when around the farm, yet she could play the lady in rustling brocades on occasion, as well as the best of them, and the girl was too quietly secure of her own position to need to put on fine clothes at all times to show it.

She crossed the pasture, threaded the grove, and penetrated the woods that covered one of the foothills of old Grandfather, before she came to a pause; and when she did, it was on the summit of a knoll that commanded a wide view of the whole Yadkin valley, and the prominent peaks of the Pine Ridge opposite and behind the homestead.

She could see the winding road that climbed old Grandfa-

ther, and the two mounted figures, crawling like insects in the distance, that she knew to be her father and Yelverton. But her eye did not rest on them long, but went roaming round the prospect as if expecting some one, and she murmured :

"How foolish I was to hurry so. He is not here yet."

The snapping of a dried stick near her caused her to start, and turning round, she beheld a tall, muscular young man, with a frank, honest face, approaching her.

He was dressed in the costume of a mountain hunter, a well-known character along the Blue Ridge, even at the present day, the prototype of the hardy frontiersmen who have immortalized American adventure.

He carried a long rifle, and two dogs followed silently at his heels. As he came up the youth removed his coon-skin cap, and spoke with a singular mixture of bashful respect and freedom.

"Miss Annie! oh, how good ye are, to come and see me. I thought that the fine captain had turned your heart away for good and all from poor Squire."

"And what right had you to think any such thing?" she asked, with a spirited flash of her eye. "Have I ever given you cause, Master Squire, to think Annie McArdle a gay light o' love?"

"Nay, surely," he said, half-frightened; "but ye know, Miss Annie—"

"And why Miss? Why not Annie? Were we children together so long, Squire, that we should Mr. and Miss each other?"

"Nay, Annie, I ha' *missed* ye sorely too long to do it *now*," said he, apologetically; and the little jest served to put both at their ease in a moment, for Annie replied :

"That's right, Squire. Keep up a brave heart, and don't be sighing all the day long because a cross has come between us. Why, don't you remember the old line that 'the course of true love never yet ran smooth?' We have but the old experience of many another, and we shall come safe at last. Think of the many lovers that have suffered in the past, Squire."

"Ay, ay, Annie, I know it, but you've learned, and read all these stories, and live in a fine house, with a broad plantation

round ye, while I'm only a poor mountain hunter, and your father wouldn't hear of me for ye, even if that fine gentleman from London were not there, which he is."

"And I tell you, Squire, that the fine gentleman is naught to me, and that I will none of him. I gave you my heart three years ago, and I'll stick to my faith—unless you're frightened, sir, and wish to cry off." And she looked saucily up at the solemn face of the young man, who was indeed much troubled and perplexed.

"Nay, Annie, ye know *I love you*," said Squire, simply; "and if ye will but wait two years more I shall have a brave farm, and be able to ride to your father's door to ask for you."

"Why not?" said Annie, tenderly, for she loved the simple, honest young hunter, for reasons best known to herself. "We are both young, Squire, and two years will only make me twenty. But how will you get a farm, my poor boy?"

"Daniel and I are going to the backwoods to find one," said Squire, more hopefully. "Oh, Annie, you should have heard Jack Finley tell about the country we're going to explore beyond the mountains. Hundreds and hundreds of miles of open forest without a bush or a thorn in the way, open green savannahs, where the buffalo range in thousands, canebrakes full of fat bear and deer waiting to be shot, wild ducks by the square mile on every pond, and not a human soul to say ye nay. I'm going there with Daniel, Annie, and we'll find a road through the mountains, so as we can bring Rebecca and the children with us when we go to settle there. And oh, Annie, when we've found that blessed country, and Daniel comes back to bring his wife and children, shan't I be able to take my wife with me too?"

And this big, simple-hearted young fellow looked imploringly at his mistress. Coquetry was wasted on him, and Annie never tried it in that quarter. She was too secure of her empire. She only looked up into his honest brown eyes and said:

"Yes, Squire, I'll come with you, if father will let me, and I think I can make him."

"And ye won't encourage this fly-away captain when I'm gone, Annie?"

"No, Squire, I won't. Rest assured of that. But where's your brother Daniel to-day?"

"Daniel's been chopping wood all the winter for the farm, while he's gone," said the youth; "and he finds he'll have a few loads to spare. I misdoubt me, he'll come to your house to sell some to-day."

"I'll buy it all, every stick," said Annie, emphatically. "'Tis but little I can do to help you, Squire, but that little I will do while I can. Let us go back to the farm, for we may miss your brother, and I should like to begin to-day, to show them all that I am not afraid nor ashamed to acknowledge that I am betrothed to Squire Boone, the best hunter of his years in the Yadkin Valley. Have done with concealment and secret meetings."

"But will not your father be angry and break it off?" said Squire, hesitatingly. He was a bold youth in the woods, but as bashful as a girl, or rather more so, in the society of the rich.

"My father will say nothing to either of us, if we accost each other openly, half as severe as if he were to learn we met by stealth, Squire. If you're afraid to stand by me, you're not the man I take you for, that's all."

"Ay, but I am though," said Squire, roused and piqued by the artful thrust of the knowing girl. "I'll come with ye, Annie, and let that fine captain say a word to me if he dares."

"Never fear. He won't quarrel with you," said Annie, laughing, and secretly pleased to see her lover fire up. "He's not one of your sort, Squire, to fight it out like a man. He'll try his arts on my father, worse luck."

And Annie's cheerful face clouded over, and she sighed deeply.

"Why, what's the matter there?" asked Squire, perplexed.

"I would I could tell," said Annie; "but I don't understand it. He has some hold over my father in some way, and every night they sit down to play ombre and basset my father is sure to lose, and still he plays on, every night, and sometimes in the daytime."

"Ah, that's something I don't rightly know about," said

Squire, in a vague manner, for he was not learned in games, any more than in books.

And then the two strolled slowly down toward the McArdle farm, chatting as they went in the free, happy fashion of young lovers, whose prospects are forever rosy, while youth lasts them. Before long they were crossing the pasture, and climbing over the stile, when both were greeted with the sight of a figure instantly recognized.

A tall, powerfully-built man, lean and sinewy, with a grave, aquiline face and piercing blue eyes, was standing on the green lawn in front of the house, leaning on an ax, and surrounded by the little children, who were prattling to him as freely as if he were an old friend or one of themselves. Grave and powerful as was his countenance, there was yet in it an expression of complete and guileless simplicity and honesty, mingled with the opposite quality of great shrewdness, that was a study to a physiognomist. This man was dressed in the same simple costume as Squire, and a certain family likeness between them was very apparent.

"Master Daniel Boone, as I live," called out Annie, with great cordiality, as she ran through the farm-yard to greet him; "I have but just finished talking about you to Squire, Mr. Boone, and he tells me you have some wood to sell. I will take it all, for indeed our servants are almost too lazy to split the kindlings, let alone fell the trees, and we are always short of wood for the kitchen."

The tall woodsman waited silently for her to finish, a grave, kind smile lighting up his face. He answered in a voice low in pitch and very quiet in tone, and in language surprisingly well chosen for a man of his plain appearance. Contrary to the common notion of many people nowadays, Daniel Boone was no ignorant backwoodsman, but read and wrote with facility, the latter in a clear and legible manner. His provincial accent was the only disadvantage under which he labored as he said:

"I thank ye heartily, Mistress McArdle. "I have been cuttin' timmer for my wife, to last her till I come back from the wilderness, and she saith that there be at least six cords more than she can use in two years. Therefore I would dispose of them and provide Rebecca with some little-money to manage

he fann while I am gone. You can have them at a Spaniard dollar the cord."

"I'll take them all, sir, and pay you now if you will," said she.

"Nay, mistress, that will not be necessary," said the woodman, with the simple dignity of a gentleman. "'Tis a fair bargain, but the wood is not delivered yet. I will bring it to-morrow. You shall pay me then if you will."

"Well, Mr. Boone, and is it true what Squire tells me, that you are going out into the wilderness with him to find a home?"

"It is true, mistress, in all save this, that *Squire will stay behind*. I go with five old friends and neighbors, and the lad will stay behind to watch over Rebecca and the little ones." And Annie McArdle flushed high, and cast a grateful look at the woodman, while Squire exclaimed:

"Nay, brother, that shall never be. I share your perils."

"Mayhap you'll do more good here, lad. Remember, Rebecca is all alone, and the children are young and tender, some of them. I have promised that one of us two shall stay, and the rest will have none but me to go with them."

CHAPTER III.

THE GAMBLER.

BRYAN McARDLE and the English captain were riding slowly homeward by a narrow bridle-path through the woods. The planter looked grave and worried, the captain, smilingly bland, but secretly triumphant. At last McArdle said:

"Well, sir, I accept your proposition. I am not one to cry off a debt of honor, which my own folly has incurred. I owe you thirty thousand Spaniards, and I will secure it to you by a mortgage on the farm. As for my daughter, I will not consent to force her inclinations to save myself. If I must needs go into the wilderness in my old age to seek a new home, I will do it, but I will not force Annie to save me. To-night I will sign you the mortgage."

"And I say to you, Mr. McArdle, that I wish to force the inclinations of no lady. Odds life, sir, I have not lived among duchesses and countesses so long, without many a chance to better my fortune. But I love Mistress Annie passing well, and for her sake I will forego my undoubted rights for two years. If she loves me then, the farm is ours together. If not, why then—"

And the captain shrugged his shoulders, expressively. Bryan McArdle sighed heavily.

"Be it so. In two years I may find means to repay you."

"Nay, sir, we will not quarrel on that. Odds life, Mac, I am not the man to refuse a brother gamester a chance for revenge. Who knows? The luck may change, and the homestead be yours again, ten times over, before the leaves have fallen."

McArdle smiled faintly at the prospect.

"Nay, there is not much chance of that, captain. Howbeit, a ruined man fears no risk. We will play one more game to-night, and if I lose then, I will never play more."

"Agreed," said Yelverton, lightly; "and now, sir, what say you to a race home? I fancy this chestnut nag can beat your bay, but I can not tell for certain. Shall we lay a little bet on it, just for sport?"

"Ten thousand dollars that I get home first," said McArdle, recklessly, for, like all unfortunate gamesters, he was hoping to retrieve his fortunes with a single stroke, as he knew his horse was good. —

"Done!" cried the captain, with a gay laugh; and the words were not fairly out of his mouth, before the Carolinian was off at full speed in three jumps. His horse was well used to the country fashion of racing, starting from a scratch, and had won many a one from his quickness of gathering himself. Captain Yelverton ground his white teeth in an ugly smile, and shot after. He was the lighter of the two, and considerable of a jockey, after the English fashion, and therefore undervalued his opponent, as Englishmen often do.

But in McArdle he encountered a born horseman, like most Carolinians, whose style of riding, though decidedly inelegant to the eye of a pupil of the riding-schools, is perfection, as regards closeness of seat and ease to the horse.

The old planter never stirred in his saddle from the time he started, and spite of his superior weight, stole gradually away from his mortified guest, till they dashed into the homestretch and came flying down the curving road that led to McArdle house. Here the planter slackened his pace, and the captain shot past, with a shout of triumph, but only for a minute.

Before him lay a semicircle of road that curved around the house pasture of the homestead, and ended in the avenue. The house itself, in a straight line from where they were, was less than half the distance. Over the high snake-fence went the old planter, with a shout, and before the captain saw the trick, he was beaten irretrievably. He made a gallant struggle, following his leader; but it was all in vain. When he leaped the last fence into the barnyard, Bryan McArdle was standing by the steps, laughing, and Pompey, with a grin that showed all his ivories, was holding the horse lately ridden by his master.

"One third gone at a clip, curse the luck!" thought the captain; but outwardly he preserved a smiling countenance, for he saw the heiress of the mansion standing near her father, with Squire and Daniel Boone. All three were laughing at his discomfiture, and he covered it with a jest.

"Some one must be last, you know, gentlemen. I'm glad it was not our host. Mistress Anne, I kiss your hands. 'Twas but a moment ago and the earth was dark, and now, odds a life, I should say the sun had risen."

As he spoke, he resigned his steed to Pompey, refraining with great self-denial, from venting his spite on the black. Pompey was evidently apprehensive about it, for he got out of the way with suspicious alacrity. But Bryan McArdle was so elated with good fortune that all his late gravity of demeanor had vanished, and he became effusively hospitable to the mortified Yelverton.

Annie, on the contrary, gave a distant and ceremonious bow to the captain, and passed over his compliments as if she had not heard them.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHOOTING-MATCH.

"COME, Annie, girl," cried McArdle, jovially, "'tis near noon, and Yelverton and I are like famished wolves. As for our neighbors, the two Boones, I'll warrant they could relish roast beef as well as venison, at a pinch. What say you, friend Daniel—will you dine with us?"

"And blithely, colonel," said the grave woodsman—Bryan had once been a colonel of militia. "I have been treating on business with Mistress Annie, and having concluded it, all parties should be satisfied, as I am."

"Ay, ay—purchasing game, I suppose, Boone. Yelverton, these two gentlemen are known as the best hunters on the mountain-side, and whenever you go out, 'twill be well to ask them to go with you."

"Ah, yes, thank you," said Yelverton, indifferently. "I never could see the pleasure of this pot-hunting, as we call it in England. 'Tis butchery, not sport."

The grave and impassive elder Boone, generally taciturn save when spoken to, to every one's surprise, put in a remark to the sneering soldier, at this juncture:

"Ain't you a leetle severe, Cap? I know we don't go out to shoot little birds for fun, as they tell me the British do, but a deer or a bear is good sport, it seemeth to me."

"Sport!" echoed Yelverton, disdainfully. "'Tis great sport, in truth, to fire from a rest at a sleeping deer, or to hunt it at night with a frying-pan of blazing pine-knots. I don't believe there's a hunter in these parts that could take a bird on the wing. Here, Pompey, Sam, Cudjo—bring me my gun, sirrah, while I show these bumpkins how to shoot."

Several negroes ran into the house with singular alacrity, for the captain was universally dreaded on the place, and the fear of his stinging whip made ready servants. In a few minutes one of them brought out a splendid double-barrel, of

the brown, clouded exterior that tells of stub-and-twist steel. The captain turned to Squire Boone, with a fine sneer.

"You are one of the famous hunters and shots, I believe, young man?"

"My brother Daniel is the best shot on the mountains, young man," said Squire, coldly. "For myself, I say naught."

"But I will, for ye, lad," said Daniel, simply. "This lad, captain, is the best hunter, for his years, that ever wore moccasins. Do ye wish him to shoot against you?"

"Nay, odds life, *I* wish nothing," said Yelverton, haughtily. "Mr. McArdle holds you up as pattern hunters, and I will show you that an English gentleman can beat the best of you at your own weapons. You see yonder flock of wild pigeons. They are coming this way and will pass over the house. Can either of you bring down one with his rifle?"

Daniel Boone was perfectly silent, a slight smile playing on his weather-beaten features. Squire answered for himself:

"I can not be certain, sir. 'Tis a difficult shot."

"And you, Master Boone, can you?" asked Yelverton of the elder hunter, with a triumphant look.

"My rifle is at home, captain," was the calm reply.

"Could you do it with your brother's rifle?" asked Yelverton, with a sneer.

"I never shoot with another's rifle," was the sole reply of the hunter.

"Humph! Your paragons are not much, friend Mac," said the captain, scornfully. "Now *I* will show you something."

As he spoke, the pigeons referred to, outlying pickets of one of the huge migrating armies of passengers, passed over the elm tree that shaded the spring-house, and the captain raised his gun and fired right and left into the flock. Three of the pigeons came fluttering dying through the air, and Yelverton laughed triumphantly.

Ere the echo had ceased, it was broken by the whip-like report of Squire's rifle, and a fourth pigeon dropped like a stone.

Daniel Boone quietly walked forward and raised the dead bird from the ground.

"A rifle is a good weepin to know the use on," he said, dryly. "Now, this bird ain't shot full of holes, but he's killed plum-dead; for all that, Cap."

Yelverton was scarcely more pleased when Squire observed:

"We mountain-men ain't apt to boast before we do a thing, Cap. But I guess we're even on that, for my gun don't pretend to scatter."

"And if you want to come here and show us what you can do, jest take an ax and come with me stranger," said Daniel. "I'll give ye your choice of trees, and I'll take another. The man that gets his tree down first shall be conqueror. Is that fair?"

"Many thanks, rude rustic, for the offer. I have not yet hired out as a day-laborer."

And the captain chafed under the quiet, sarcastic tones of the hunter's voice.

"Well then," said Boone, quietly, "either of us will try a fall with ye, if ye wish, and give the under hold. We're Carolina, and they're hard to beat, young man."

Yelverton looked at the borderer doubtfully for a moment. Then he turned away into the house, with a slight smile, not saying a word.

Bryan McArdle began to look grave. He had taken no part in the dispute, but secretly felt gratified that his native province had not been worsted in the little trial. Annie was the first to speak, which she did with great unction, saying:

"Hurrah for the Old North Province, Squire. You beat this bragging Englishman at his own game. Oh, father, weren't you glad to see *my* Squire outshoot him?"

"*Your* Squire!" echoed McArdle, with a grave look. "What do you mean, child?"

"I mean that I have promised to marry Squire, father, as soon as he has a farm; and that Daniel is now going across the mountains to find a land where we may all get farms without paying for them."

CHAPTER V.

THE PIONEER HUNTER.

Two years have passed away since that May morning in the Yadkin valley, and the scene changes to far different surroundings.

By a little fire in the dense woods sat a solitary hunter, whose face and form were those of Daniel Boone. Around him, for miles and miles, stretched the solemn colonnades of the primeval forest, lofty oak trees springing fifty feet in air without a branch, and then spreading out into a dense canopy of verdure. Not a tree was less than a yard through the middle, and not so much as a single shrub or bush broke the level beneath, covered with velvet moss.

Boone's fire was small and red, made of the dryest of wood that gave no smoke, and further sheltered by being built in a hole in the ground. Near it lay the carcass of a dead buck, from which the hunter had cut a steak which he was broiling on the red coals, the while his ears were keenly alive to every sound in the forest, and his calm, keen blue eyes never missed the sight of a single object.

The day was slowly fading away, and the woods were full of mysterious noises, that to the uninitiated ear were full of vague terrors. But the lonely hunter knew them all, and never turned his head when a deep, booming report, as loud as a cannon, echoed through the silent woods.

He knew too well what it was. Some giant of the forest had lived its time out, after hundreds of years, perhaps, and now, its mighty roots rotted through at last, had fallen prone to earth, to mingle with its native soil, and be devoured by the ever-present fungi, those scavengers of the vegetable kingdom. The singing of locusts, the distant *chug* of the bullfrog, the occasional note of a thrush, and the scampering rush of squirrels up and down the trees, disturbed him not. The fitting, ghostlike figures of deer, hovering at a distance to look curiously at him, never caused him to look up. All these

sights and sounds were familiar to him of old, and he needed no more game as yet.

But when Boone, on a sudden, suspended his occupation, without any apparent cause, caught up his rifle, and threw himself down behind a tree, you might know that he had heard or seen something.

Not a word did the solitary hunter speak. He had been alone too long in the woods, surrounded by dangers, to be given to soliloquy. His thoughts might shape themselves in words in his mind, but they found no way to his lips. He was all alone, with a single rifle and twenty bullets left, in the heart of the Shawano hunting-grounds, his only safety lying in concealment. No wonder that he went to cover at the first unusual sound or sight.

And what was it that had disturbed the veteran woodsman? Only this. A deer had scudded past, within gunshot, at full speed, and the frogs had ceased to croak in the quarter of the forest from whence came the frightened animal.

Only this.

But Boone was too well read in the lore of the forest not to know that some human being had made appearance in that region. The beasts of the forest had been his outlying pickets too long to deceive him. He lay down behind the tree, watching and listening intently, secure against the sight of an enemy, except by chance.

With the cunning of a veteran in woodcraft had his camp been constructed, where the projecting roots of two old trees had hidden the ground for some eighteen inches. The body of his game lay behind a root, and the fire was burnt down to red embers, hidden in the little excavation. Even the keen eye of the Indian hunter would not have marked aught unusual in the forest.

But all this while the hunter had been watching and listening, and nothing rewarded his patience for some time. At last a smile illumined his grave features, when the sound of the distant snort of a horse echoed unmistakably through the forest.

That sound meant much to him.

The approaching stranger, whoever he was, could not be an Indian, for they had no horses. It must be a white man.

If a white man, it must be a hunter. If a hunter, it must be a friend. If a friend, it must be in search of himself, for no other cause would have brought a single man out into that then unknown wilderness, full of dangers.

Silently Boone rose to his feet and looked round the trunk of the tree in the direction whence the snort had proceeded. He beheld a single horseman, a golden ray of sunlight falling on his head, slowly riding through the dim arcade of the forest, straight toward the camp-fire.

A common sight would not have recognized this distant figure, but Boone's sight was beyond the common, and was strengthened with practice. He took one long look at the distant figure, and then spoke aloud, for the first time in many months, saying:

"Squire."

Then he threw his rifle into the hollow of his arm and stepped plainly into sight, waving his hand to the distant horseman. The other no sooner saw him than he broke into a gallop, and came rapidly through the woods to meet his brother.

Squire Boone it was, older and graver than before, but full of strength and vigor, who leaped off his horse and accosted Daniel with the simple greeting:

"Daniel, I am glad I found ye so quick."

"And Rebecca, the children, how are they all?" was the first inquiry of the husband and father.

"Wed, well, all well and hearty," was the reply. "Jim's grown a famous hunter, Dan. The lad can draw a bead as well as I can myself, now."

"Good," said the gratified father—Jim was his eldest son. "And your own wooing with Annie, boy, how speeds it?"

"'Twas that which brought me here," was the simple reply of Squire. "Annie is to be married next July to Captain Yelverton."

Daniel gazed at his brother a moment without speaking. Then he quietly proceeded to unsaddle the horse, saying:

"Sit ye down, and eat, lad. We will talk over this matter at leisure. It must be of moment to have brought ye all this way. I will see to the good beast."

Squire was a man of almost as few words as his brother. He sat quietly down by the fire, drew the carcass of the buck toward him, cut himself a liberal portion, and proceeded to roast it, before saying any thing more of his errand.

The two brothers knew each other, and both were *natural gentlemen*. The manner of their greeting and conversation was therefore peculiar. Daniel was longing to hear of his wife and children more than the brief news he had just listened to. But he saw that his brother looked worn and troubled with his own affairs, and he forbore to ask.

Squire, on the other hand, was longing to unburden an aching heart to his brother, but he knew what that brother wished to learn and controlled himself to give the news about his sister-in-law before his own.

When Daniel had fastened the horse to a root, and shaken out a liberal feed from the grain-bag behind the saddle, he came quietly back, and sat down by Squire, and said :

"Now, lad, tell me all thy troubles."

Then, while waiting for the other to begin, he took up his piece of venison and proceeded to broil it, as if absorbed in that occupation.

Squire gulped down something in his throat.

"Dan, ye're a good man. I left Rebecca and all the children on the farm, with plenty of every thing to eat, drink and wear. Jim, Nat, and Young Dan, are all well grown boys now. Two years makes a vast difference, ye know. I wouldn't have come if they weren't fit to take care of their mother awhile. Rebecca has never ailed a day, and Jemima and little Alice are shooting up into slips of girls. The cattle are increasing with the blessing of the Lord, and ye have twelve cows and two yoke of steers, brother, besides two mares with colts trotting by them."

Daniel reached over and grasped his brother's hand.

"Thank thee, lad. Now to thine own affairs. What means this marriage in July?"

Squire's face lowered.

"'Tis a long story, brother, but soon told. The captain's a villain and a crafty one. He has got Annie's father, more's the pity, into a habit of gambling. One time the old man would almost win back his farm from him, and would play

on, still hoping to release himself from the clutches of the gay gentleman. But 'twas all in vain, at last. The more the colonel played, the more he hungered for it and the deeper was he entangled. He loved Annie, as thou knowest, brother, but even her entreaties were not enough to save him. He knew we loved each other, and that we had been betrothed. Himself consented to it. But when that devil got him in his power, he grew more desperate every day, and at last told me 'I must look elsewhere. His child was no match for a mountain hunter.' Surprised, I questioned him. He would answer naught, but roughly bade me leave. I sought Annie. She was not to be found, save in her chamber. That night I received this letter, brother, and what, think ye, she says?"

Here the speaker produced from his bosom a deer-skin case, from which he drew a small letter, which he handed to Daniel.

The last level rays of the setting sun at that moment pierced the forest glades, through a distant rift in the branches, and the hunter read these words:

"DEAREST SWEETHEART—If thou would'st save me, my father, and thyself from ruin at the hands of a villain, leave here instantly, and seek thy brother Daniel. Bring him back hither, and I will meet ye both in the gorges between old Grandfather and Hawk'sbill what time I see a token cut in the bark of our elm tree over the spring-house. Come secretly, and let no one know ye are here till I see ye. If ye fail, I have promised to marry Yelverton in July, for thine own two years are over. Thy true love, if thou art bold.

"ANNIE MCARDLE."

"Now, brother, what means she?" demanded Squire, innocently. "I have done her bidding, albeit I comprehend nothing."

The hunter cogitated in silence for some moments. Then he said:

"I can read the track of all beasts of the forest, and tell where the red heathen lurk, but I can not understand a woman's ways. Howbeit, I have seen enough of this country now, and my spirit yearns for Rebecca and the little ones. I will obey Mistress Annie's request. The Lord hath ordained me an instrument to people the wilderness and make

the waste places full of people. Therefore we will return to-morrow, Squire, and make glad the hearts of our dear ones. Is it not so?"

Squire was about answering, when his brother started, and the solemn, somewhat abstracted air with which he had spoken vanished. He gripped the other's arm forcibly and whispered:

"Down, lad, to cover. The heathen are abroad. We must move our camp to the canebrakes, for they have not seen us yet."

CHAPTER VI.

THE COMPACT.

IN the large, old-fashioned parlor of the McArdle mansion the daughter of the house was seated by her harpsichord, playing low, rambling, melancholy melodies in the evening twilight, while Captain Yelverton stood at a little distance, gloomily contemplating her with folded arms.

Annie's music was like her feelings at the time, mournful and desponding. Yelverton himself did not wear his usual gay and debonnair aspect. He, too, seemed to be affected with doubt and gloom.

When the girl had played some time in the gathering darkness, Yelverton suddenly addressed her:

"Annie, tell me truly, am I very hateful to you?"

"You are," was her cold reply.

Yelverton frowned and set his teeth.

"And why?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Because you persecute me, and ruin my father."

"Persecute you, Annie? Nay, I love you too much for that. Is it a light thing that I, who might wed in the proudest houses of England, come hither to beg you to be my wife? I offer you an honorable love, Mistress Annie. I ask you to be the future Lady Yarmouth, and you know my father, the earl, is an old man."

Annie turned round to face him.

"Captain Yelverton, I am much honored by your choice, but you well know, none better, that I was betrothed to an honest and brave man, years before you came to this valley. What call had you to come hither, sir, to make war where peace was till you came?"

"As to why I came here, mistress, 'twas but by chance as you know. As to why I stay, you know, none better, that 'tis because I love you."

"But you have no right to love me, sir."

"Nay, lady, love is a free god, with wings, and he flies where he will. I can not help my love, any more than your cruelty. Alas, I know that too well, to my cost."

"Captain Yelverton," said Annie, "you know 'tis not I that am cruel. 'Tis you who are pitiless, to my father."

"Far from it," said Yelverton, quietly. "Your father, Mistress Annie, has contracted an unfortunate passion for play, and I must needs indulge my host's whims. You know yourself that I never press him to play—"

"No, not *now*," said the girl, with cutting emphasis.

Yelverton ground his teeth hard, but continued calmly:

"Nor ever. How we first fell into the habit I know not. I have been used all my life to play as a gentleman is wont, for amusement. But I can not help my luck. You know well, mistress, that I have given Colonel McArdle all the chances to win back his estate that I could, and all for love of you."

"Out upon you!" she exclaimed, indignantly. "Is it love for the daughter that makes you rob the father?"

"Rob is a hard word, Mistress Annie," he said, smiling; "but I will let it pass. Rob, if you wish it—yes—that I may give it all back to my wife on her wedding-day."

"That day will never come, with me, sir."

"You mistake, mistress; it will, for your father is a man of honor, and you will not see him turned out into the woods in his old age to seek a new home. Remember, I hold a deed now of all his property, and every stock and stone on this estate belongs to me alone. What say you to that, madam?"

"I say that if you will to turn us out, the good God will avenge our cause on you yet, Captain Yelverton. And so I will bid you good-evening."

"Stay, madam," said the captain, very blandly, as she rose to leave the room. "There is one way out of all this trouble, which I can show you."

"What is it?" she asked, hesitating.

He drew from his pocket a great parchment deed.

"Your father, madam, is a man of honor. The law gives me no redress for a debt of honor, and he might have well denied all knowledge of those he owed me. You, on your part, are pleased to call me a robber, to doubt my love for you, and to treat me as no other lady, thank God, has ever treated me before. Madam, I will show you that Augustus Yelverton can do a generous deed as well as the roughest country bumpkin whom you think honest because he is rude. Here is your father's deed to me of all these broad acres. Thus I tear it in two, and to you, madam, I commit the fragments. Now, perhaps, you will believe I love you."

And the gambler deliberately rent the deed into pieces, and handed them to Annie.

Yelverton was a keen observer of human nature, and he had not misjudged Annie. The proud Southern girl dumbly received the torn fragments of the deed, and her bosom heaved violently with contending emotions. Yelverton had surprised her, and for the first time she felt sorry for what she had said to him. And moreover the captain was a very handsome man, and in the dim twilight she could not see the expression of his face, but only hear his mournful and melodious voice.

"Captain Yelverton," she began, "if I have wronged you I would gladly make reparation—but—"

"You can easily do it," he answered, eagerly. "Promise me that you will, if I ask nothing that your conscience forbids."

"Ay, I will promise you *that*," said Annie, without hesitation.

"Then listen," he said, rapidly. "You are betrothed, you say, to this young Boone, and did promise him to wait two years for him, when he, on his part, would have a farm to take you to. Annie, that two years will be over in June. Promise me only this, that if he does not come then, you will marry me in July. No doubt, by this time, the youth—he is

honest but ignorant—has found out how hopeless it is to try to win you. I am ready and willing and anxious to wed you at once, to make you my Lady Yarmouth in prospective, and show you a life of ease and pleasure in future. I ask you not to break your troth to him, but if he fails to keep his promise, that you will wed me when his time has expired."

Annie trembled violently, for she heard her father's step coming toward the room, and she dreaded to say the irrevocable word that would place her in Yelverton's power, as much as she felt reluctant to repay his generosity with injury.

"Give me time to think, sir," she said, faintly. "I am not well, I do not feel able to—"

The door opened, and Bryan McArdle entered the room, bearing a lamp, and looking gloomy, as usual of late.

"What, all in the dark?" was all that he said; and then he put the lamp down on the table, and surveyed them in silence.

Bryan McArdle was a man of easy and generous nature, with strong passions that he had never learned to control. He had all the faults of the old Southern planter, with the excellences that belonged to the same nature, among which may be counted a singularly delicate perception of honor. If in a moment of passion he ran his head into peril, he was too honorable to try to save himself from the consequences, however onerous to himself. On the other hand, nothing would have tempted him to involve another in his ruin. He had gambled recklessly, and lost his whole fortune to one man, and that man offered the whole of it back, to use his influence on his daughter. And Bryan uniformly refused to say one word to Annie in favor of this man, whom he liked as a jovial companion, and felt grateful to for sparing him so long. As Yelverton had said, Bryan had a *passion* for gambling, and dragged his guest with him. If the captain was the more skillful, he was not to be blamed. Bryan felt this, and blamed himself. The mental torture of the last year, that had made him a beggar and tenant on sufferance, had turned Bryan's hair gray. He felt that he had beggared his daughter, and more than half of his feverish passion was that hoping against hope to win back her patrimony.

"What have you been talking about?" he asked, more to break the awkward silence than for any interest in the subject.

Neither of the young people answered him.

Bryan looked a little surprised, and asked:

"Annie, child, what is the matter?"

Annie suddenly turned to him.

"Father, did you give Captain Yelverton a deed of all this estate, and is it true that you are ruined?"

"It is true, child. Thy father has beggared thee," said McArdle, slowly and simply. "Were there any help in doing it, I would blow out these brains, but, alack, that would not help thee, Annie. We must e'en go forth into the wilderness, child, and do as others have done before us—work for our living. Captain Yelverton, since my daughter knows all, of course we trespass on your hospitality now. This place is yours. Will you accord us till to-morrow to leave it?"

Again there was a dead silence.

At last Annie said, in a trembling tone:

"Father, do you know what these are?"

And she held up the fragments of the torn deed.

"No," he answered, listlessly, and sunk down in a chair, as if benumbed. Indeed, the man felt stupid with despair.

"These are the torn pieces of your deed to Captain Yelverton, which he has just given to me as a present."

McArdle started and looked bewildered.

"What do you mean? Have you consented to marry him to save your father?"

"No, sir," said Yelverton himself, in a grave, sad voice, and with the bearing of a perfect gentleman. "Mistress Annie McArdle did think and express herself that the deed was unfairly obtained, and I would not have you think that Augustus Yelverton is a robber. Odds life, Mr. McArdle, you know if I have treated you fairly or not."

Bryan McArdle slowly rose and confronted Annie with an ashy face.

"Do I understand you, my daughter, that Captain Yelverton tore up that deed without requiring a promise at your hands?"

"He did, sir," said Annie, faintly.

"Then, my child, he is—"

And the planter choked, and could not proceed.

"Nay, sir," interrupted Yelverton, "I would not have you think me better than I am. I am satisfied that Mistress Annie would like me, were it not for the young hunter, Boone. I have but asked her this, that if he do not keep his promise to return in June, with the possession of a suitable estate for marriage, that Mistress Annie will consider herself bound to wed me on the first of July."

"And what say you to this?" asked McArdle, of his daughter.

"I say nothing—I—I—spare me, Captain Yelverton—I know you have been very generous to us—father, advise me, what shall I do?" And the girl turned to him, trembling.

Bryan McArdle looked grave and stern.

"It was not the wont of the old McArdles to be outdone in generosity," he said, coldly. "I dare not advise my daughter, lest men might say I did it to save my forfeited estates. This I know, that *my* honor will not suffer me to receive a gift of winnings from any gentleman that has fairly won them. Captain Yelverton, I shall see that a new deed is drawn up for your benefit to-morrow, and we will leave the next day."

And Bryan McArdle, pig-headed and self-indulgent, but sensitive to the core on the point of honor, turned to leave the room, when Annie sprung forward, crying:

"Father, father, do not go thus. I consent. If Squire does not come back in June, I will wed the captain on the first of July. I promise it, on the word of a lady, on the faith of a Christian."

And then the handsome captain advanced with an air of great sincerity and affection to Annie, and said:

"And I, on my part, promise that I will never handle a card again when your father is at the table, for it seemeth to me that I must be bewitched at such times. Such luck I never had elsewhere."

Then, turning to Bryan, he held out his hand, saying:

"You will not refuse the gift from your daughter, given to her by her betrothed husband. The estate is yours once more, colonel, and long may you live to enjoy it."

Bryan McArdle's voice was husky and broken, as he said :

"God bless thee, Gus. Annie will love thee in time, never fear, when she knows thee for the true comrade I do."

And Annie fled from the room in tears, for she was sorely shaken with the struggle that had terminated so sadly for her.

Yelverton laughed heartily, all by himself that night, when the rest of the household were asleep. The cause of his merriment was best known to himself.

CHAPTER VII.

THE JOURNEY.

THE Boone brothers slept all night in a canebrake, and woke in the early dawn to listen to the notes of thrush and mocking-bird piping overhead.

Both the veteran hunters came broad awake in an instant, and the first instinctive action of each was to reach for his rifle, rise on his elbow, and listen intently. Save the usual sounds of the woods, nothing was audible. The old horse, who had cropped the grass bare around them, had lain down close by, and was lazily stretching himself.

Daniel rose to his feet the first, and stole softly off, through the canebrake to reconnoiter.

Squire saddled the horse and made ready for departure, when he quietly awaited his brother's return. He had not long to wait. In a few minutes after, Daniel came silently back, and said, in a low voice :

"The heathen are out of their camp, and coming through the woods. If they pass our fire they will doubtless notice it, and we must move out, for there are fifteen of them, and I have slain never a man of them yet."

"We can beat off fifteen such as them, easy enough, bro-

ther," said Squire, calmly. "Thou knowest best, however. Shall we fight, or flee with the horse?"

"We must flee," said Daniel, after a short pause. "I will not take innocent blood on my hands, if I can help it. Mount the horse, brother, and follow me."

As he spoke, he plunged into the depths of the canebrake at a rapid pace, followed by Squire.

The horse was a well blooded animal, like most Southern stock, and kept up a round trot, but the strong woodsman kept ahead of him all the time, without appearing to labor.

They passed through the nearly dry canebrake, skirting occasional pools of water, leaping from island to island, wherever the ground became boggy, and tufts of dry grass warned them of the only practicable places. The startled deer scudded away on either hand, and the birds became silent where the brothers passed.

At last the ground rose before them out of the swamp, and the same eternal primeval forest spread before them, in which Squire had met his brother the evening before.

Into the forest they sped, and there Daniel halted for the first time. He cast a rapid, searching glance back through the woods, and calmly observed:

"The heathen are at fault, brother, like hounds on a false scent. They have found the fire and are following the trail."

"How know you that?" asked Squire, for the first time surprised into asking a question.

"I heard them yell as they passed through the brake," said Daniel. "Doubtless they are jealous of intrusions on their hunting-grounds."

Squire shook his head.

"You have sharp ears, brother."

"I have lived in peril, like the hare," said Boone, simply. "Come, brother, let us go onward."

Again they struck off, this time in a direct line through the woods toward the east, and the distant ridges of the Alleghenies. They saw and heard nothing more of the Indians in whose vicinity they had slept, and around them was all the wondrous beauty of the western forest. The game seemed to

swarm everywhere, for deer flitted past, almost as tame as sheep.

Daniel strode on ahead, his calm but penetrating glance sweeping the forest on every side. Once they crossed a trail of moccasined feet, and the borderer stopped a moment to inspect it. It proved to be the track of the very party they had left behind them, one day old.

Daniel pointed it out in a few words, and they passed on in silence after that.

Anon the black, lumbering form of a bear was seen some way off to the right, followed by two little dark objects that looked like cubs.

Instinctively Squire handled his rifle, for he was an old bear-hunter. His brother forbid it with a gesture, and they passed on.

"There is a village of the Shawano, some hours' run to the left," said Daniel, in a low tone. "If they hear the sound of a rifle, they will be out in swarms, and they run well."

So the old she-bear passed them unscathed.

About noon they came to the edge of a basin in the woods, where the ground had given way, perhaps centuries before, from the dissolving action of water on the limestone beneath. At the edge of this the brothers halted, and Daniel said:

"We are safe now, brother. Let us make a fire and cook our meat. We have taken no food since night."

"Is it safe to halt yet?" asked Squire, doubtfully. He was a veteran hunter, but unused to Indians.

"It is thus far safe," said Daniel, coolly. "We have gained two hours on the heathen, and they can not catch us before we have eaten our fill. There is corn left in thy bag brother. Feed the good horse with the last mouthful. To-night he shall feed on the sweetest pasture in the world—the blue grass of the Kain-tuck-kee. Didst ever see a buffalo?"

"Nay indeed, brother, what is that?"

"'Tis a great beast with a black mane, formed like a bull, but with the aspect of a lion. I have shot such. Thou shall see them to-morrow."

By this time they were in the hollow, and the pioneer, splitting off the tinder-dry bark of a fallen tree, struck fire

with his flint and steel, and in three minutes had a small but brightly glowing fire burning on the top of the rotten log, over which the brothers cooked their simple meal of venison.

Every thing the borderer did seemed to be guided by a calm and unruffled composure arising from absolute certainty of his ground. Where another man would have been some time starting a fire, the pioneer chose the right part of the tree as if by an instinct, to make a small fierce fire without any tell-tale smoke.

Then, as they sat enjoying their woodland meal with the keen relish of hunger, Daniel Boone, for the first time, began to talk, half to himself, half to his companion.

"The ways of the Lord are wonderful, Squire, and none know Him that haven't lived in the temple His hand made, the woods. All these two years I've been alone with Him, brother, and His hand has been stretched out over me. When the heathen smote down Finley and Stewart and McCool and the rest, why wasn't I taken? I was left all alone amidst enemies, without sugar or salt, without a human being to speak to, or so much as a horse or dog to share my loneliness. Squire, 'tis in those times that a man learns to fear the God that made him, and 'tis then he finds who is the stronger, man or his Maker. When I'd sit by my camp-fire, and think of Rebecca and the children, my heart would yearn to embrace them all, but I knew that I must do what the Lord made me for, when he ordained me an instrument to people the wilderness."

The pioneer finished his monologue and picked up his rifle, saying:

"Come, brother, 'tis time to go. The heathen are nigh in sight."

Squire bridled the horse and mounted, then followed his brother out of the hollow, and they struck off again through the woods at the same rapid pace as before.

Nothing was seen or heard of their enemies for some time, and Squire began to think they were quit of them at last, when the woods ahead of them revealed a break, and his brother said:

"Yonder is a hill, and beyond it a river. On the other

side you shall see the buffalo, and I will tell you if the bea-then are still following us."

In a few minutes they emerged from the woods, and climbed a steep hill, the first outlying spur of the Appalachian chain. On the summit Daniel Boone paused and pointed back.

Below them lay a dark sea of forest, covering the country for miles, while around its outskirts lay green, smiling plains, streaked with silver rivers, dotted with clumps of trees and little hills.

"Yonder is the Shawano village, and on the plain are the buffaloes," said the pioneer.

Squire looked forth. A faint blue canopy of smoke hung over the distant forest, near its further edge. Beyond, on the plains to the north, and again, on those skirting the hill on which they stood, numerous dark objects moving about could be seen, which Daniel said were buffaloes.

They were the first that Squire Boone had seen, and were as thick as bees in a swarm, while the sound of their bellowing rose to where the hunters stood, softened by the distance into a minor monotone that harmonized with the sighing of the breeze in the forest below.

The brothers stood gazing at the scene in silence, and the usually taciturn Daniel was the first to speak. There was something in the calm deep nature of the man that attuned itself to the voice of nature. He loved the works of God so much that they made him speak as nothing else could.

"Squire," he said, softly, "when first I stood on this hill and looked out over the plains of this favored land, five strong brave men stood by me, and we rejoiced together that the Lord had shown us such a goodly heritage. Brother, of those five not one is left, and I only am alive to tell the people of the Yadkin what manner of land this is, and how I was preserved. And yet, brother, I am loth to depart from it and bring back settlers. A few years more, and yonder forest will lie low, while of all that great herd of God Almighty's cattle, not one will be found this side of the great river. The ax and the rifle will turn paradise into a market for men to buy and sell, and you and I, brother, where shall we be? And yet it must be done, for I am but an instrument to people the wilderness, and the deer and bear have no souls like

men. It's a mighty onreasonable soul a man has, brother, but it's better than a beast's. Come, we must be going, for the sun's setting, and we must get to the mountains before we can make a fire."

Squire looked below them into the forest.

"Will *they* follow us further, think you, brother?"

"Ay, surely," said Daniel, gravely. "They'll follow us as long as the horse's track holds, or till the edge of the settlements. But I haven't lived alone among them, this long, with their best trackers after me, to be taken now. Follow me, brother."

And he turned and descended the further side of the hill with the same unweariedly vigor as if he had just started. Squire followed him, and the country soon began to assume a more rugged aspect, while the blue peaks of the Appalachians towered before them in plain sight.

They pressed unwearied on, till sunset found them in a dark gorge of the hills, and Boone showed his brother the entrance to a large cave, where he announced that they would pass the night.

"And I defy the best tracker in the Shawano nation to find us there," he said, a gleam of honest pride illuminating his grave features. "I found it on a hunting trip and stored enough wild rice here to feed a regiment of dragoons. Come in, brother."

And they entered the retreat.

CHAPTER VII.

CAPTAIN YELVERTON.

THE Hon. Augustus Yelverton was out for a ride, and seemed to be in a remarkably pleasant frame of mind, for he frequently laughed as he rode along. He was going toward the mountains, and his way led him past the Boone farm, which lay next to the outskirts of the McArdle homestead. It was but a little place, close under the shadow of old Grandfather, a clearing of a few acres amid primeval woods,

and much of the former clearing overgrown with a second planting and incumbered with brushwood.

A field of corn surrounded a log-hut, and a few hogs roamed at large in the woods, while a dozen cows and some horses, all feeding loose, constituted the whole worldly wealth of the absent pioneer. And yet that was not all, for a numerous family of boys, three of them almost men, and two daughters of full age composed a species of wealth likely to prove still more valuable in the future among the backwoods.

Captain Yelverton rode straight up to the door of the log-hut, and was at once greeted with the open-hearted hospitality of the true mountaineer by a young man who sat at the door, cleaning a long rifle.

"Good-morning, stranger. Will ye 'light off your beast and come in? We'll be having dinner in a bit."

"Many thanks, my young friend," said Yelverton, blandly; "but I am on my way a little further on. This is the house of Mr. Daniel Boone, is it not?"

"Ay, ay, sir, but he's not here. Father's been away in the woods for nigh two year now, and uncle Squire has gone after him."

Here a handsome, buxom woman with black eyes came to the door, and said:

"Ye'd better 'light off, captain, and take a bite with us. If ye want to know any thing about Daniel, we know as much as the next. I'm main persuaded he'll be back in a few days. His brother's been gone nigh on three months for him."

Captain Yelverton had removed his laced hat with the same courtesy he would have shown to a duchess. He was a great favorite of late with the farmers' wives in the valley, from his handsome face and courtly bearing, and he had completely dropped the supercilious airs which had given so much offence to the hunters formerly.

"This must be Mistress Boone, I know," he said, smiling. "I have heard my friend McArdle tell of sweet Rebecca Bryan, that he used to court, till Hunter Boone won her from him. Ah, Mistress Boone, I see he did not tell me false about your face and figure."

Rebecca Boone blushed and smiled. Hard-worked woman as she was, the flattery touched her and she laughed.

"I mind McArdle well, when he was a gawky young fellow, and hadn't pluck enough to kiss a girl. But 'light off, captain, and walk in."

"Many thanks, Mistress Boone, but I am bound to the woods to-day, to look after a deer. I suppose Squire went off through Wind Gap on his search?"

"Ay, sir, and thence to the Holston. 'Twas that way Daniel went."

"Is there any doubt of his finding him, madam?"

Rebecca Boone laughed.

"Squire'll find my Daniel, if he's above ground, captain, never fear. And the heathen savage ain't made that can circumvent my Daniel. But you're going arter a deer. Why hadn't Nat, here, best go with ye? He's a main good shot is Nat, and used to the woods, where you might get lost."

Yelverton smiled blandly.

"I know it, madam, but a man must learn to hunt some time alone, and I am going to practice. Therefore, farewell."

And the captain bowed to his horse's mane with great grace, and turned away.

The Boones looked after him in a little wonder, and Nat said:

"He's a main pretty looking man, mother, but he'll never kill a deer. Uncle Squire says he can only shoot with them scatter-guns, and what's them to a deer?"

"My son," said the dame, simply, "'tis not for us to sneer at others. Let us do our own duty. If ye want to fetch in a quarter of bear-meat to morrow, 'twill be as well, for there's naught but a buck in the house, and he's dry and tough."

And Rebecca returned to her churning, while Nathan resumed the polishing of his rifle.

Meanwhile, Captain Yelverton cantered leisurely round the base of old Grandfather, and was soon lost in the shadow of the woods. Those woods climbed up the mountain side for a short distance, and filled the gorge between Grandfather and Hawksbill to the north, a narrow road, intersected with stumps, having been cut through the midst of the forest.

The captain rode up this road, smiling to himself, and soon found himself completely hidden in the gorge. The road

wound here and there among the stumps, continually ascending, while the approaching mountains gradually assumed the form of precipices.

Captain Yelverton began to look puzzled.

"She can not surely be daring enough to ride up here alone," he muttered. "And yet I'll swear 'twas in this very direction that she rode when I lost sight of her. Now if she has come here I shall doubtless see some print of a horse-shoe hereabouts; and, by heavens, there it is, plain enough. Why didn't I look for it before?"

Sure enough, in the mud between the stumps, here and there at intervals, the print of a horse's track appeared plainly, and Yelverton saw that he was right.

"Aha, Miss Annie," he soliloquized, as he rode on, so you think to measure wits with me and come off victor. I trow not, mistress. You little think what a hold I have upon both of you. This Southern honor is as good a security as I want on her part. She will keep the compact in July, if her lover comes not again, but she hopes that he will, no doubt, and rides this way to meet him daily. So, my lady, he is not come yet, and I will make it my business to see that he does not come."

The road wound on amid wilder scenes yet, the woods ceased and became scattered in little clumps of trees half-buried in coppice, while the gray rocks stood out from the soil or towered up in masses among the trees.

Yelverton began to ride much more cautiously now, peering out all the time ahead. He expected every moment to catch sight of the form of Annie McArdle on her gray pony, either riding on or coming back to meet him.

It was growing near the end of June, and the Boones had not yet made their appearance. In a few days more Yelverton felt sure he should be able to claim his bride and her dower. None knew but himself the trick he had played to extort the promise he had from the generous girl. The burnt paper which she believed a deed of her father's property, and which she had consumed with her own hands, had been but a worthless parchment which the astute officer had substituted for it in the darkness. His *show* of generosity had done all he required. It had roused the real generosity of the high-

spirited girl, who had thrown herself a sacrifice on the altar.

The selfish and calculating man had determined not to throw off the mask till after his marriage, and would not have waited that long but for one thing: he really loved Annie; and for her sake was willing to forego for a while his hold on the McArdle homestead.

After a short time spent in riding among rugged rocks, the captain turned aside from the path and dismounted.

A very tall peak of rocks, steeple-like in form, and known as the "Chimney Rock," stood not very far from the path at the summit of the pass. Yelverton knew that its top commanded a view over the Yadkin valley, and on the opposite side, toward Cumberland Gap and Blue Ridge range.

He led his horse back among the rocks and hid him there, then slowly and cautiously climbed up the rugged ascent of the Chimney Rock, half-hidden by the bushes and projecting spurs of stone. He bore at his back a short German rifle, with which he had practiced much of late, alone in the woods, for an infinite number of villainous schemes were seething in the captain's mind every day, and one of these demanded that he should become a good shot.

When Yelverton arrived at the top of the Chimney Rock, he found a perfectly secure hiding-place, where two peaks jutted out, each three or four feet high, and a number of large bushes completely concealed his figure from view below.

Before looking out, he satisfied himself that he was quite safe from observation himself, and then, taking off his hat, peered cautiously through the bushes toward the west.

He looked into a deep valley including a small lake, and at once beheld the object of his search, riding slowly along by the banks of the lake, quite alone.

"So the lover comes not," he muttered, rubbing his hands. "So far so good, mistress. Now, what brings you here?"

He saw the girl stop by a large, hollow tree, which grew over the water at a place where the encircling woods came close to the shore. Elsewhere there was a wide margin of green grass and a strip of muddy beach.

Annie McArdle paused at the old tree, dismounted, and he

saw her take something from her bosom and put it in the hollow tree.

Then she remounted and slowly rode back toward him, up a narrow, stony path, and close under the shadow of the Chimney Rock. Yelverton could see her face plainly, and hear the ring of her horse's hoofs, as she passed by.

"You can go back, my lady," he said, in a low tone. "I have found all I wish to know. Spite of your Southern honor, you are trying to cheat me. We shall see."

He waited till she was fairly out of sight on her way home, when he quickly descended the rock, went for his horse, and rode rapidly down the path to the lake. In a very short time he was there, and hurriedly flung himself off his horse.

He looked into the hollow tree, and there as he had expected, lay a little white note.

He took it up and read on the back :

"For Daniel and Squire Boone."

"Daniel and Squire may both go hang," he said, with a malignant sneer. "I think I had best read all the letters my future wife sends to other men, and that there may be no mistake, I'll read this now."

And he deliberately opened the letter and read it through.

Whatever its contents were they were not what he expected. At first he turned pale and shook with terror. Then an evil smile covered his face, as he ejaculated :

"We shall see, my lady. We shall see. *He* never gets this."

Then he crammed it hastily into his pocket, mounted his horse, and galloped away up the pass, with pale face and flaming eyes, muttering curses.

"So she will try to set her bullies on me!" he cried, once. "Ah, Mistress Annie, but you shall sip tears of blood for that letter. I can outshoot the best of them all."

He turned aside from the path and rode a long distance through the woods till he came to a solitary spot he had often visited. Here he spent the afternoon firing at a target.

The target was a nail, and he could drive it twice out of five times.

CHAPTER IX.

A MASTER OF WOODCRAFT.

NOT half an hour after Yelverton's departure from the mountain lake, two men, one of them leading a horse heavily loaded, came quietly out of the woods on the western side of the little valley. They were Daniel and Squire Boone, both afoot now, for the faithful horse bore on his back a load of the most valuable furs, the very pick of the produce of the pioneer's hunting for two long seasons, hidden by him long ago in the gorges of the mountains.

They had thrown out their Indian pursuers long before, and had come along at a brisk pace, only pausing to hunt for food and let their animal eat.

Daniel Boone paused when he entered the open space, and for the first time in their journey, exhibited emotion, as he recognized each well-known feature of the landscape.

He halted and leaned on his rifle in silence, his features working violently, while Squire eagerly looked round him, as if expecting to see some one.

"Squire, lad, ye're *sare* Rebecca and the young ones are all safe?" said the pioneer, huskily. "'Tis a long time to be away from one's kin, and natur's a-tugging powerful at my heart. Mayhap I should have come back before, but I fairly couldn't leave the great, still, solemn woods, with the little birds singing hymns in the branches, and the frolicsome deer skipping by, as tame as sheep. But tell me, are they all well at home?"

"They were, when I left, brother," said Squire, absently.

He looked vaguely disappointed at something, for, unreasonable as was the expectation, he had somehow thought of seeing Annie by the lake.

It was an old-time trysting-place with them, when they were boy and girl lovers, and many a time had Squire and Annie sat side by side in the old hollow tree by the water-side.

Daniel noticed the absent tone of his brother, and said, half aloud :

"Ay, ay, he told me so, and I'm bothering the lad. Come forward, boy, and let us go seek those we love. Thou shalt have thine Annie, and McArdle shall have a plantation bigger than ten of what he owns now."

And the hardy pioneer threw his rifle over his shoulder, and marched along the borders of the lake toward the hollow tree.

In a few minutes more he was there, when he halted suddenly, and pointed to some tracks in the mud by the water-side.

"Some one has been here, brother," he said, quietly.

Squire Boone started forward and instantly recognized the trail leading to the hollow tree.

"'Tis Annie!" he exclaimed. "She has been here and left a message for me in yonder tree, brother. I hoped it, but dared not expect it."

He was rushing toward the tree, when the cautious Daniel stayed him with a gesture.

"Keep back, lad," he said, gravely. "One'd think ye a greenhorn on his first hunt. Don't ye see?"

And he pointed to the tracks again.

"The gal's rid up to the tree, first, and slid off. Here's where she clumb up ag'in. The man's horse has a bigger foot than the pony, and see here. Wherever the tracks come together, the big hoof's all clear, and the little one's squashed in. Tharfore the man's horse came in last, and *he's got whatever she put in the tree*. See, here's *his* foot where he came down heavy off the horse. 'Tis no cowhide boot, brother, but a fine town-made thing, with a heel no bigger than a big Spaniard dollar. Ye know who wears that kind o' boot, Squire."

"Ay, ay," said Squire, in a hoarse whisper, and his face grew scarlet with suppressed passion; "I know, and I'll be even with him, the pale-faced, town-bred puppy. "Let us track him down and shoot him, brother. He has given us foul play for fair, and stolen my letter, and I'll shoot him on sight."

And the fiery young woodman was about to dash off once more on the plain trail, when Daniel checked him.

"Squire, I'm ashamed of ye. Ye start like a babbling pup on a false scent. We know where to find this city gentleman, when we want him, but we know not what Mistress Annie requires of us yet. A Southern gentleman is bound to attend to a lady's business before he attends his own, and we have not seen Mistress Annie."

And the roughly-clad hunter drew himself up with the simple dignity of a prince, for it is in the free woods that a man becomes a true gentleman, and is proud of the name.

Squire hung his head, and looked rebuked.

"You are right, brother," he said, humbly. "Go on, and do as you think best."

Daniel pointed to the tracks again. He seemed to be able to read their indications as easily as an open book, for he said :

"The man must have been watching her, for he went straight up to the tree without searching. She didn't see him, for his tracks are newer than hers. Yonder he hid."

And the hunter pointed with almost supernatural intelligence, at the tall spire of Chimney Rock.

Squire stared at his brother in amazement.

"How know you that?"

"'Tis the only hiding place around, and the tracks go straight there. Let us follow, and see if I'm right."

As he spoke he strode forward, glancing occasionally at the track, which lay plain and broad, now in grass, now in mud, in a straight line toward Chimney Rock.

As the hunter had predicted, it led close under the rock, and a little heap of dirt, lying at the foot, showed where some one had recently ascended the rock.

Squire was for going up to see if Yelverton was still there, but Daniel, with a few quiet words, showed him the true course.

"The big horse's tracks follows the pony's close. The gal must have got past the rock on the way home before he started, or she'd 'a' seen the tracks and swerved somewhar. Whereas she's gone straight home, and he's followed her. See the track now. Here's whar he took his horse in to hide among the rocks, but he kem out. And see, he's been a-follering her all the way from home. These gals must be blind ~~not to see~~ such a plain track. Come on."

And away went Daniel again on the track of the watcher. The dandy captain little thought what an unerring experience was reading every step he had taken, and interpreting his every motive with the relentless accuracy of fate.

In a little time they came to the place where Yelverton had turned off into the woods and again Daniel halted. This time he waved back his brother, and examined the track with very great care and attention, going down the narrow road some distance, but taking pains to keep at the side, out of the tell-tale mud.

When he came back he stood still considering for several minutes, and as he did so, the sound of a shot from the woods came to his ears.

"I thought as much," said the woodman, calmly. "Squire, the little gal never suspected she was followed. How should she, when she's been livin' in a house all her days. She came up and went back, and never noticed *his* track. He's out yonder in the woods, but what he's doing beats me."

Crack!

A second shot, multiplied by the echoes of the deep woods into a roar, announced the whereabouts of Captain Yelverton, with perfect facility.

Squire flushed hotly.

"Let us follow him, brother," he said, angrily. "I want to meet the cold-hearted villain, and have it out with him."

Daniel raised his hand with a warning gesture.

"Not so fast, Squire. Ye're over hot, yet, my lad. I'll follow him, for I'm kinder curious myself to see what he's after. But ye must remember we're not in the wilderness now. Thar's law and courts, more's the pity, in this colony, and we can't settle our own disputes without comin' into law."

Crack!

A third shot in the woods made them both look at each other, this time with mutual curiosity.

"Take the beast into the woods t'other side," said Daniel, in a low voice. "I'm going to find what he's up to. 'Pears like he's shootin' at a mark, for the shots all come from the same place."

Squire was only too glad to obey. His revengeful feelings had begun to give place to curiosity as to his rival's occupa-

tion, and he assisted his brother readily enough to lead the horse into the woods a little distance off, where they threw off the pack, and left the animal to rest, unseen from the road.

Just as they were turning away, a fourth shot pealed through the woods, and Squire was starting off, when Daniel laid his hand on his arm.

"Put down your rifle, brother," he said, quietly. "Ye ain't cool enough. I wouldn't be, if the man was after Rebecca. One rifle's enough ag'in' one man."

Squire demurred, but his brother stepped gravely in front of him, saying:

"See here, Squire, ye shan't go a step that a-way, *armed*. I'll not allow it. Lay down the rifle, or you and I part company."

Squire trembled all over for an instant with passion; then, as suddenly, mastered himself and became unnaturally still.

"You're right, Dan, you're always right. I'll never be a hunter like you."

And he laid down his rifle at the foot of a tree as he spoke, took off powder-horn and pouch and hung them on the knife which he stuck into the tree.

Daniel Boone smiled gravely and approvingly, threw his own rifle into the hollow of his arm and started on the way toward the distant firing. As he did so, a fifth shot pealed out.

The two brothers crossed the road in silence and followed the track of Yelverton's horse into the woods, where they were not long in discovering the captain's locality.

First they saw his charger tied to a tree, and before long the flash of a rifle revealed the man himself in an open glade of the woods, reloading his weapon.

Daniel motioned to his brother, and the two glided softly from tree to tree, unseen by Yelverton, who was intent on his mark.

When they had secured a good position, both sunk down on their faces, and watched the soldier's proceedings with great interest.

Captain Yelverton was very cautious and deliberate in

loading his piece, and equally so in his aiming. The results of his practice were decidedly good.

Once he drove three long nails into a tree, one after the other, with three successive shots, and Daniel made a sign of his approbation to Squire.

The honest young hunter, though it went sorely against the grain with him, was forced to admit that he himself could have done no better.

Then at last Yelverton uttered an impatient exclamation as he felt in his bullet-pouch.

"Only one left, and I was improving so fast. Bah! never mind. I can meet that hunter now. I'll go home."

As he spoke, he emptied his last charge into the rifle, rammed it home, and returned to his horse.

As silently as spirits the two hunters followed him to the road, and saw him ride slowly and thoughtfully down to the valley.

It was some minutes after Yelverton's disappearance ere either of the brothers spoke.

Then Daniel uttered a low laugh.

"These city fellers are right smart at some things, brother, but they ain't worth a heap of corn shucks at others. Look ~~that~~."

He pointed to the tracks of their own horse, plainly visible, close to where Yelverton had ridden out.

"Now, you or I, brother, would have noticed that in a minute and wanted to find whar it come from; but this hyar captain he's so much taken up with his shootin' he don't think of aught else. Shootin' ain't enough to kerry a man through the woods, if he hain't got good sense."

And the pioneer quietly crossed the road and again approached the patient companion of their journey, who greeted them with a low whinny of welcome.

Squire silently assumed his accouterments and resaddled the horse, while the elder Boone stood leaning on his rifle, as if buried in thought. At last, when Squire announced that he was ready, Daniel abruptly asked:

"Hast thou still got Annie's letter, brother?"

"Ay, surely," said Squire, simply. "How could I lose it, brother?"

"Read it over once more," said Daniel.

Squire was used to obey his brother, who never acted without a motive. He produced the letter from his bosom, and read it slowly and carefully over.

At one passage Daniel said :

"Read that again, brother."

And Squire repeated these words :

"Come secretly, and let no one know ye are here till I see ye."

"Good," said the pioneer, with the Indian gravity he always possessed. "She is a right smart girl, Mistress Annie McArdle, and knows these settlement ways. Let us do as she says, brother. Thou and I will lie out in the woods for one more night."

"Nay, brother," said Squire, coloring deeply, while his eyes filled ; "but Rebecca and the children. Thou long'st to see them, and it is not my affairs that should keep thee from embracing thy wife and sons and daughters."

For a moment the calm, set features of the pioneer seemed to be disturbed by some emotion. Then they settled again into his usual benevolent quiet, and said :

"Brother Squire, I've lived in God's woods two year, and learned to do as he loves me. Rebecca is mine, and no man can take her from me. Ye tell me she is safe and all are well. She can wait, and I can wait a day longer after two years. But thine Annie, boy, is different. She's not thine yet. Men are trying to take her from thee, and thou alone canst not help her. She has asked my help, and she shall have it. Thou'lt keep camp to-night, and I'll go into the valley and cut the token she asks on the elm tree. In the morning, we shall know what danger threatens her. Don't talk, brother, but let us go back to the lake and camp."

As he spoke, the lion-hearted man turned his back on the home he had not seen for two years, and led the way back to the lake.

CHAPTER X.

THE MIDNIGHT WATCH.

ABOUT midnight after that same day, the people in the Yackin Valley were all fast asleep in their houses, when a single man came forth from the woods at the base of old Grandfather, and went straight down the valley toward the McArdle homestead. On his way thither he was compelled to pass close to the little log-hut where the Boone family lived, and the man paused in the clearing by the hut, and surveyed it intently and in silence.

A dull, red glow that shone from the little window announced that the fire was still burning, and the man approached the window and looked in.

The dull, red light of the fire gleamed on the barrels of several rifles hung up against the wall in beautiful order, on a shelf full of brightly-scoured pots and pans, and on several rude beds, on which reposed the slumbering forms of five youths from boyhood to manhood.

At the further side of the room was a closed door, and on this door the man's gaze rested intently, while his lips moved silently.

For several moments he stood thus, as if glued to the spot, then moved away with a deep sigh, and resumed his course.

As he went, his lips kept moving, but no sound issued from them, and yet that man was praying earnestly.

But for all he was praying, and that his soul was absorbed in the spirit of his prayer for the beloved ones he had passed by, his senses remained keenly alive to every sight and sound, with the unerring instinct of the old woodsman, for this man was the very master of all woodcraft.

He passed through field and plantation, straight as a die, and in half an hour from the time he entered the valley, he stood before the avenue to the McArdle mansion, whence a score of hounds bounded forth open-mouthed to challenge him.

The stranger stood perfectly still in the road, as the dogs came out, leaning on a long rifle, as motionless as a statue.

The hounds, seeing no indication either of fear or menace in his silent figure, gradually ceased their baying as they came near and began to walk around him, snuffing the air suspiciously and growling, but comparatively quiet.

Then the stranger spoke in a low tone.

"Why, Sweetlips, why, Trajan, why, Chanticleer, don't ye know me, dogs?"

Instantly an old and patriarchal hound came close to him and snuffed earnestly around his legs, when the dog uttered a low, complacent whine of joy, and put up its head to lick the stranger's hand.

From that moment the peace was sealed, for the father of the pack had recognized the visitor, and the youngest puppy there was ready to follow suit, with the headlong trustfulness of youth. The stranger patted several of the oldest dogs kindly, and then moved toward the house, surrounded by the now friendly crowd. He paused by the spring-house, and looked up at the mansion. It was all in darkness save in one spot, where a single window, lighted by a candle, showed that some one was keeping watch.

"Now if that's the villain himself," soliloquized the stranger man, almost inaudibly, "I mout be doing the Lord a sarvice in puttin' a hole through his carcass with my old rifle. But that ain't what you came here to do, Dan'l, which was to save a pair of young folks from a right smart chance of trouble. Therefore, let's do as the lady said."

He leaned his rifle at the foot of the old elm tree, and drew a knife from his belt.

"Now if I was talkin' turkey to an Injun," he said to himself, "I'd make a totem and the savage would understand, for the Lord has gifted them with uncommon sense. But this hyar's a gal, and gals are silly critters, with book-larnin' enough, and not a sense of woodcraft. So I'll have to talk book to her, and cut a big D. *She'll* know who's been thar."

As good as his word, the stranger slowly carved a large D in the rugged bark of the elm, and then turned toward the house.

The light in the window was still burning.

"I mout as well see who's thar," muttered the man to himself. He threw off bullet-pouch and horn, and began to ascend the old tree. With so many huge branches spreading in all directions, it was an easy task, and before many minutes were over, the man outside was looking into the lighted chamber from an altitude of some forty feet, which revealed the whole place to his sight.

The Honorable Augustus Yelverton and Bryan McArdle were seated by a little table together, playing cards, and the earnest, excited face of the planter, deadly pale as it was, showed that fortune had been unfavorable to him.

"So-ho," said the man in the tree, softly to himself, "that's why the delicate town gentleman stays here. I never could see the sport of throwing little pictures back and forth and throwing money after them, but McArdle seems to like it. Now what does that mean? If 'twere an Injun, I should say devil-try!"

Captain Yelverton's back was to the window, and the man in the tree distinctly saw him slip two cards out of his hand behind the table and substitute two others out of his sleeve, wide and roomy as it was, in the fashion of the day.

The hand was played, and immediately after Bryan McArdle's face flushed eagerly, and he seemed to be overjoyed at something.

"What fools some people are about cards," quoth the man in the tree, with a silent laugh.

Yelverton's face could not be seen, but it seemed to be his turn to deal. The man in the tree watched him closely as he dealt, and this time the gambler performed the same trick as before, substituting two cards from his sleeve.

Bryan McArdle seemed to be under great excitement this deal, and was seen to speak eagerly before it, to which the other replied. But question and answer were alike inaudible at that distance.

Then the two began to play, this time very slowly and cautiously, while Bryan's face was set with an anxious frown.

The man in the tree, not in the least understanding the game, yet looked with great interest at the gamesters.

McArdle's face, in the fluctuating light of good and ill fortune, was sufficient to interest any one. As card after card

was played, he seemed to be suffering an agony of suspense, which at the first trick culminated.

Slamming down his own card on the table, he half-rose, and gazed on Yelverton with slightly open mouth, as if longing to know how his adversary would meet it.

Then the man in the tree saw Yelverton throw his own card on the table in a careless manner, at which Bryan stared as if he were petrified. Then the planter sunk down in his chair once more, and covered his face with his hands, while he shook all over.

Yelverton calmly rose, and the man in the tree saw his face for the first time. It was very pale, but there was a devilish, writhing smile on the haughty upper lip that was decidedly unpleasant to look at.

The captain went quietly toward the mantelpiece, filled and lighted an Indian pipe which hung there, and calmly puffed a volume of smoke from his chiseled lips. At the moment he seemed to be indeed chiseled out of marble, so utterly devoid of feeling for the crushed and broken man before him was he.

In this posture affairs stood for some minutes, the man in the tree watching curiously.

At last Yelverton seemed to say something to his host, for McArdle rose slowly, passed his hand across his forehead as if to clear his mind, and then quietly left the room.

The man in the tree noticed that he staggered as he went.

Yelverton waited till the other was fairly out of the room, and then appeared to be greatly tickled, for he laughed again and again, all to himself, as he slowly began to undress.

Then the man in the tree appeared to think he had seen all he wanted, for he slowly descended from branch to branch till he stood on the ground.

Once there, he delayed no longer, but struck off across the fields to the foot of old Grandfather, wading across the shallow stream of the infant Yadkin to get there.

Straight through the silent woods he kept a bee-line, till he was completely lost to sight from the valley, and the glimmer of a distant light far ahead warned him that he was approaching some solitary hunter's camp.

Very soon he was near enough to see a horse tied to a tree

quietly munching an armful of green-corn, a dull red fire of small logs, and a man sitting by the fire in a gloomy and rather despondent attitude.

The man advanced boldly into the firelight, and the gloomy watcher looked up, disclosing the face of Squire Boone.

"What news, brother?" he asked, listlessly, for Squire was gloomy at having his brother do all the work for him, and dissatisfied with his position of camp-keeper.

"I have left the token," said Daniel, briefly; "and I have seen the gay town gentleman cheating McArdle at cards."

Then he sat down by the fire, and leaned his rifle against a tree.

"I couldn't help looking in at the old shanty, Squire," he said, after a meditative pause; "but they didn't see me, and they were all happily asleep. Thank God for that, brother."

Squire reached out his hand with moistened eyes, and grasped Daniel's hard and horny palm in silence.

"Ye took good care of them, lad," said the husband and father, huskily. "The shanty looked as neat and wholesome as if I'd been there myself, maybe more so, for I was ever out hunting. I'll stand by ye, Squire, and may Annie be as good a wife to ye as Rebecca hath been to me. Now I'll tell ye what I saw."

And the pioneer detailed all that he had seen when perched in the old elm tree above the spring-house.

Neither of the hunters was learned in the mysteries of cards. Bassett, ombre and piquet, the fashionable games of those days, at which the gallants risked their money, were unknown mysteries to them. But, like all backwoodsmen, then and since, they had often seen such simple games as Old Sledge; and the merest tyro was capable of perceiving that keeping cards in one's sleeve was a sort of cheating which vitiated any man's winnings.

Still, learned as they were in wood lore, such was the simplicity of both that they did not know what use to make of their discovery, and the night wore away with the question still undecided, till Squire put a stop to it, saying:

"Neither of us knows what to do, brother, so we may as well tell it to Mistress Annie when she comes in the morning,

and she'll tell us what to do. Trust a woman in the settlements. She's naught in the woods, but we're naught here."

"And that's well said," observed Daniel; "so let's go to sleep, brother, and the morrow shall tell us what to do."

And the sturdy pioneer rolled himself in his blanket, and fell fast asleep in less than a minute.

As for Squire, he dreamed all night that Yelverton was playing cards with him, for Annie's heart, and that Daniel stood by with a rifle, threatening to shoot the first man who cheated.

CHAPTER XI.

BLOWING ROCK.

Captain Yelverton did not rise so early as usual next morning, for he was tired out with the night's game. His sleepiness was a bad thing for him as it turned out, for he missed a point in the greater game he was playing for Annie.

What the subject of the night's gambling had been, was a mystery as yet unsolved, inasmuch as McArdle had nothing more to lose to all appearance. That it had taken place, Annie was well aware, for she knew that her father and the captain were never shut up together save for one purpose.

But as she could not help it, she did the next best thing, kept her own counsel, and was up betimes next morning about dawn, when she hurriedly dressed and went down to the garden. Her first visit was paid to the spring-house, and her first glance revealed a large capital D., cut in the bark of the old elm tree.

"Thank God!" murmured Annie, fervently. "They are come at last. Now we shall see."

The girl returned hastily to the house. Her father was still sleeping heavily, and no one was up but the servants. Quickly Annie assumed her riding dress, swallowed a few mouthfuls of breakfast, ordered out her best horse, and was soon galloping away on the road to the gorge that led to the mountain lake.

She threaded the dark path in the forest, passed close under the spire of Chimney Rock, and in a few minutes beheld the little lake and the hollow tree which she had visited the day before.

But when she came there, not a figure was in sight.

The deep, bowl-like valley was perfectly empty, and Annie felt a thrill of disappointment as she gazed.

"Can I have been mistaken?" she murmured. "Perhaps they are hiding in the woods, but that is strange. What have they to fear? No human being could have seen me yesterday. I am sure. I will go forward and seek further."

She galloped rapidly down to the lake, and soon found herself near the hollow tree, where she halted and dismounted.

Eagerly she peered into the dark hollow, expecting to find her letter there, but the hollow was empty, and she drew back in dismay and bewilderment.

"They have got my letter, and yet they are not here," she said to herself. "What does that mean?"

Fall of vague disappointment she looked around her, and the gleam of something white struck her eye at a little distance. Hastily mounting, she rode toward it, and discovered a scrap of paper pinned to a twig with a large thorn. The quick-witted girl in a moment divined it must be a message for her, and picked the paper off the branch.

It contained only two words. "BLOWING ROCK."

Annie knew what it meant, instantly. The place of meeting was changed, for some cause best known to her friends.

Blowing Rock was one of the lofty summits of the Blue Ridge, about a mile off, standing at the edge of a sheer precipice, and overlooking the delightful little valley of the John River, a tributary of the great unknown rivers of the west country.

Without any more hesitation she urged her horse onward, and emerged from the valley to the west, by a narrow gorge that wound upward with still increasing slope, till she was climbing the precipitous sides of the mountain on which the remarkable peak known as Blowing Rock was situated.

All this time not a sign of the Boones had she seen.

Even had Annie been a skillful woodman, she might have looked in vain for their tracks in the mud and grass. Both

were too cautious in dealing with an enemy, from habit, to expose their retreating footsteps. Had it been an Indian scout on the trail he would have needed all his skill to lift it. But Annie had the paper to guide her, and proceeded fearlessly. She knew not that watchful eyes were on her all the way, and rifles in practiced hands ready to bear on any one who might follow her with evil intent.

In a short half-hour after leaving the lake, the steep path to the summit of Blowing Rock, about two hundred feet above, rose before her, and as it was too steep to be ascended on horseback, she tied her animal to a tree and toiled up on foot. When she arrived at the top, a magnificent view spread before her, the winding stream of John River below, Grandfather, Hawksbill, and Black Dome, Clingman's Peak and Linville Mountain lifting their hoary heads to the sky along the horizon, while a dark belt of forest covered every thing and harmonized the rugged outlines of the mountains into soft curves.

But all the grandeur and beauty of the prospect, were as nothing to Annie at that moment, for she realized that she was alone on the summit of the rock, and that none had come to meet her.

Involuntarily, she was so overwhelmed with disappointment that she sat down and burst into tears, thinking herself to be deceived.

The voice of her lover pronouncing her name not ten feet from her, reassured her, and she sprung up, crying:

"Oh, Squire, thank God, I have met you at last."

Squire Boone rose from behind a ridge of rock at the very edge of the precipice, where he had been lying concealed, and advanced to meet her.

For a few moments the two lovers were too much occupied in the joys of meeting after long separation to think of any thing else, but, the first surprise over, Annie inquired:

"And Daniel, where is he, your brother?"

"Daniel watches for us below, Annie," said Squire, gravely. "We have a dangerous enemy, my girl, and Daniel is waiting for him. You know who he is."

"Captain Yelverton," said Annie; "but he can not follow us here. He knows not which way I came."

"He followed thee yesterday, Annie," said the young hunter, simply; "and what's more, he stole thy letter from the hollow tree. What was in it, Annie?"

The girl turned pale as death when she heard that news, and faltered:

"Are you sure of that, Squire? Oh, my God, then he knows all. Where, where is Daniel?"

"Here, and at your service, mistress," said the calm, clear voice of the pioneer, at a little distance below them.

He was coming slowly and leisurely up the path from the bottom of the rock, where he had withdrawn himself on the pretext of watching for Yelverton, but really and truly out of a singular delicacy to avoid embarrassing the lovers in their meeting.

Annie flew at him and devoured with him kisses, far more freely than she had bestowed them on Squire, exclaiming:

"Oh, Mr. Boone, 'twill be all right now you're come. I feel it."

Indeed it was singular what a sense of reliance and trust seemed to be felt by every one who came in contact with that simple honest woodsman, all unlettered as he was. It was something, doubtless, in the unswerving will expressed by the iron mouth, joined to the gentle truthfulness of the eyes, that caused this feeling in poor Annie, surrounded as she was by the meshes of deceit.

Daniel Boone smiled gravely and kindly at the enthusiastic girl, as he said:

"I am right glad to see ye, Mistress Annie. And now let us hear all your troubles. The English captain stole your letter from the tree, and we tracked him where he had followed you from home. Was there aught in the letter ye would not have known?"

"Ay, by him, as yet," said Annie; "and now he knows all I fear his vengeance. Listen, and I'll tell you."

She detailed to them the circumstances under which Yelverton had trapped her into the giving of a specific promise to marry him in a certain event, as already told in these pages, and concluded thus:

"I never thought, Mr. Boone, but what I had misjudged

the captain, and owed him a reparation. What could I do, when I held the torn fragments of the deed in my hand, and my own father urged the man's cause? Yet some vague feeling, half understood, told me that all was not right, and I begged desperately for time to consider. It was all in vain. I yielded and gave a solemn promise, which can not be broken. And then, when I fled to my own chamber to think over what I had done, I found that I had unconsciously retained possession of the torn fragments of the deed. I looked at them, at first vaguely, then with a sense that all was not right. Squire, Daniel, think of what I must have felt when I discovered that I had been tricked, that the instrument in my hand was no deed, but an old lease of one of my father's farms long ago expired. With this hypocritical pretense of generosity he had wrung from me, one of a race that never lied, a promise to wed him in two days from now, nay, I mistake, *to-morrow*, and I can not escape the fate, for I can not break my word. Now, gentlemen, you are of the South, and you have heard all. Shall I keep my word and what should be done with this man?"

"Curses on him! I'll tear him limb from limb," said Squire, hoarsely. "Keep faith on a promise got by a lie? Never!"

Annie turned toward Daniel who stood by the edge of the precipice, leaning on his rifle, like a carved statue.

He had listened to the whole story in silence without offering a remark.

"What say you, Mr. Boone?" asked the girl, timidly.

The pioneer lifted his head slowly and gazed out over the mountains, before he spoke. Then it was in a melancholy dreaming tone that he said, as if half to himself.

"There's white natur' and red natur', and the red has to give way to the white; for what's a red savage after all but a sinful waster of the good God's gifts? He'll slay a buck and take a haunch, leavin' the rest to the beasts of the field to devour, as if they warn't able to hunt for themselves. And yet the red-man has a gift sich as the white don't dream on. He'll keep his word, till death. And the white man'll lie to save his hide."

"Surely, brother," said Squire, angrily, "you forget your-

self when you talk thus. Annie shall *not* keep her word to this villain. I'll marry her myself. It is not too late."

The pioneer shook his head gravely.

"White natur', lad, white natur'," he said. "Ye've no home to take her to. She's kept her promise to *you*."

And Squire flushed deeply and hung his head. At that moment he felt the sting of his poverty too deeply to speak.

Annie said nothing. She only looked imploringly up to Daniel, as if her fate hung on his decision. His words had revealed the whole weakness of her case. Squire had no home to take her to, and even if he had her father was left a beggar, in Yelverton's power.

Then in the midst of a deep silence, the sturdy hunter spoke in a low, compassionate tone, inflicting pain only from the necessity with him of speaking truth.

"A promise is a promise, Mistress Annie, and must be kept, even to a liar. If the captain is ready to claim ye to-morrow, ye must even wed him at noon time, as ye promised. As for Squire, ye have kept your promise to him, and owe the lad naught. But I too, Mistress Annie, have made a promise and I too will keep it. I have promised Squire ye shall wed him, and ye shall. 'St! no talking, Squire, till thine elder is done. Mistress Annie, ye can do naught to help yourself. Ye must go back home, and get ready to be wedded to-morrow. Squire, ye can do naught. Ye must go to the woods and hide till I tell ye to come forth. I must settle this matter for ye both."

But Squire was indignant and refused to listen.

"What, see my sweetheart carried off by a villain, and I lift no finger to help her? Never."

"Then marry her," quoth Boone, dryly; "and where will ye take her?"

"I will take her—oh Annie, will ye not trust me to take care of ye? I'll work till I drop dead for ye."

"Much good 'twill do her," said the eldest, still more dryly. "Can ye save McArdle homestead for Anne's father? If ye can, then he may give ye his daughter, for gratitude."

"Ay, I-can," cried Squire, eagerly. "I can tell what you saw last night up in the tree, brother—"

"Silence!" interrupted the pioneer, sternly. "I tell my

own tales, Squire, and ye could do naught without me. When ye were a lad, I taught ye to still hunt your first buck, and ye trusted me. Will ye do less now? Mistress Annie, always keep your word, and I will keep mine. I promise that we shall wed Squire to-morrow; therefore be ready in your bridal attire. Will *you* trust me?"

Annie looked up into the blue eyes of the honest woodman, and read in their depths a certain deep meaning that induced her to say in low tones:

"I do, sir. I will do as you wish."

"Good," said Boone, in his gruff Indian fashion; "you shall not repent it. Squire, will ye trust me too, lad?"

Squire stood sulkily by, listening to the colloquy.

"What am I to do all this time?" he asked. "Why shouldn't I track him down and shoot him? 'Twould end all trouble."

"Because the man must be killed in fair fight before all men," said Boone, calmly. "We are in the colonies now, and the law favors no murder. Be easy with this. The man shall die. *I have said it.*"

Annie started and looked up at Daniel's face. It was as calm as ever, but its expression was changed. The lips were compressed like iron, and the brows were slightly knit together, giving a look of stern, fixed purpose to the pioneer's countenance that it seldom wore. Savages on the war-path saw that look long after, and learned to fear it, for it boded death to their bravest and best warriors. Squire looked at it now, and wondered.

"Ay, he may die," he said, obstinately; "but not by my hand. And who so fit as I to avenge Annie?"

"The man the lady chose to take up her quarrel," said his brother, quietly. "There is no claim like that, Squire."

Squire drew back as if stung.

"And you can not trust *me*, Annie!" he said, reproachfully.

"Oh, Squire," was her answer, "I love you too much to expose you to peril; and your brother is so brave and wise that—"

"I understand," said Squire, bitterly. "I am of no account, and you dare not trust me. As for me, I'll not take a bride

of my brother's winning. Therefore, farewell. I'm going to shoot Yelverton."

He turned and plunged down the path leading to Chimney Rock, before Annie could say a word, and was gone in a moment. In another, Daniel was following, and Annie was left alone.

CHAPTER XII.

SHOT FOR SHOT.

CAPTAIN YELVERTON awoke with a start from troubled dreams, to find the sun shining in at his chamber-window, and to hear all the various noises which indicated that the farm-life of the McArdle homestead was fully awake.

He sprung hastily from his bed, dressed himself hurriedly in riding-costume, and hastened down-stairs, to find breakfast waiting for him and nobody but servants present.

"Where's Mr. McArdle?" he asked.

"Spec' he's to sleep, marse cappen," said old Venus, grinning; "leastwise, he berry late to bed."

Yelverton swallowed his breakfast in silence, after ordering his horse, and when he had finished, carelessly inquired:

"And Miss Annie, where is she, Venus?"

"Missy Annie done gone ridin' 'bout sunrise, marse cappen."

Yelverton uttered a surprised oath under his breath, seized his hat and rushed out.

Pompey was holding his horse at the door.

"Get me my rifle, quick, you lazy hound," said the amiable officer, with a cut of the whip; "and if you're over forty seconds I'll cut your black heart out."

Pompey vanished, with a howl, and reappeared with the rifle in a jiffy. He knew that the captain always kept his word in such matters.

Yelverton seized the rifle, dashed the spurs into his horse, and shot down the road toward the mountain gorge like a flash.

"By heavens, they must have come and have let her know in some manner," he muttered. "Her letter spoke something of a signal. And I have been sleeping while they were working. One thing—they must be in the mountains, where my rifle is as good as theirs; and by heavens, I'll give this crack hunter a shot which will finish all his schemes. He shall not get the best of Gus Yelverton at any point, if I have to commit twenty murders. Murders! Bah, what's shooting a man here in the backwoods? They've no laws here."

And thus it will be seen what a different opinion two different men entertained of the laws of the old North Colony. The hunter feared them—the town-bred dandy and gambler despised them.

Yelverton kept his horse at a furious speed all the way to the mountains, and by the time he reached Chimney Rock the animal was all in a lather.

The captain did not ride any further. He fully expected that his victims, Annie and the two Boones, were in the valley by the lake, and he had seen too much of the keen vision of mountain hunters to desire to expose himself on horseback at the top of the pass.

He dismounted and tied his horse to a tree, and then slung his rifle to his back and climbed up the lofty rock, keeping its bulk between him and the valley, so as to hide himself from view.

Arrived at the top, he was exceedingly cautious to conceal himself in the bushes between the pinnacles before doing any thing else. His nerves were much shaken with the rapid ride, the exertion of climbing and the excitement of anger; but he had sufficient control over himself to lie down and rest in perfect quietude for several minutes.

Yelverton had not become a successful gambler without some good qualities, chief among which were indomitable courage and coolness.

After a pause to collect himself, he took off his hat and peered through the bushes in front, parting them softly with his hands. He did not dare to expose his head to sight.

By these means he commanded a perfect view of the little valley, the lake and the hollow tree.

All were quite solitary.

"Odds life!" muttered the captain, "is it possible I can have made a mistake, or do they meet elsewhere?"

He raised himself cautiously and peeped over the bushes, only to find his first view confirmed.

Not a human being was in sight.

Yelverton sat up and ruminated. Had he been a keen woodman he would have come down and searched for tracks on which to reason. But Yelverton was town-bred and knew nothing of the art of trailing.

So he sat there, for once in his life puzzled, and only realized that, for some cause, his enemies had met Annie somewhere else.

Where that was, he had no idea, and not the remotest suspicion of the way in which his own trail had been lifted the previous day.

In a word, he was quite at a loss for the moment.

To him, sitting there, gloomily meditating and cursing his luck, suddenly appeared the figure of a man, coming flying out of the mouth of a gorge on the other side of the valley, and running like a deer toward the water.

Down went Yelverton among the bushes in a moment, and a fierce, triumphant smile appeared on his face as he poked the muzzle of his rifle through the bushes and cocked the piece.

The eyes of hate are sharp, and he had recognized the form of his rival, Squire Boone, in the approaching man.

More than this, Squire was alone, and coming straight for the rock, rifle in hand.

"I dare say, now, yonder bumpkin would much love to shoot me," said the ambushed officer, coolly; "and they say he has often shot deer from a stand. Now, friend, thou art my deer, and here goes for thine antlers. Odds life, 'tis all fair in love."

As he spoke he rested the rifle on the rock, took a deliberate and careful aim at the unsuspecting hunter, and pressed the trigger.

There was a flash and a smoke, through the midst of which he saw Squire throw up his arms and fall, after which he lay still.

"Odds life, I nicked him," said the captain, joyfully, and he jumped upon his feet.

Hardly had he done so before there was a flash from the woods beyond Squire's body, and the next moment the crack of a rifle was followed by the *ping-phzzt-chuck* of a bullet, which passed through Yelverton's coat and vest, tore a ridge in his side like the scratch of a wild-cat, and slapped into the rocks behind him.

The reply was so unexpected that Yelverton was thoroughly cared.

Moreover, those who have suffered from bullet-wounds are aware that such grazes as he had undergone are ten times more painful and alarming at the moment than serious wounds. The scratch rips fifty nerves, where a deep wound cuts but one.

Yelverton, thoroughly frightened, could see no one who had fired. He hurriedly felt for his bullet-pouch, and discovered, to his ineffable dismay, that he had left all his loading-materials behind him in his hurry, and therefore was practically weaponless.

In great tremor, his first thought was of escape; and without any more efforts at concealment, he scrambled hurriedly down the lofty peak of rock, dropping his rifle in his hurry, and reaching the ground only to find the stock broken short off by the fall. But he had no time to waste then.

Hastily picking up the stock and barrel he rushed for his horse, untied the animal with shaking hand, climbed into the saddle and galloped away.

He knew well enough who was on his track. The stolen letter had spoken of Daniel Boone, and he had heard tales of the latter's shooting that told him plainly enough to whom he was indebted for that close graze at such a distance and on such a short glimpse.

But as he rode along and put distance between himself and his dangerous foe, he began to encourage himself.

"After all, I have done one thing," he muttered. "I have killed that presuming bumpkin, the brother, and 'twill be a fair fight now 'twixt me and Daniel. Next time, I will be loaded, and have a second load with me."

So he comforted himself, and rode harder than ever toward the homestead.

Presently a thought began to trouble him.

"What if the law should amount to something, after all? They may call it murder."

He pondered on this for several miles.

"Never mind," he said, at last. "No one could have recognized me at that distance, and I am safe on the plea of self-defense. I can show the bullet-holes through my clothes, and swear the bumpkin fired first. There's no witness but the brother, and I can outswear him any day."

So Captain Yelverton rode more leisurely as he approached the McArdle mansion, and passed in at the gate in a temper so unusually amicable that Pompey stared with dilated eyes.

For Yelverton actually said, "Thank you, Pompey," when the boy took his horse; and, after fumbling in his vest-pocket, drew out a shilling, which he threw to the astounded negro.

Pompey looked after the Guardsman with a quizzical look.

"Golly, marse cappen, reckon you muss have seen de debil, and he's frekened you. Nebber seen him like dat afo'. Jes' 's civil 's ole marse himself."

Meanwhile Yelverton went into his room and mechanically felt in the skirt-pocket of his coat, where he had put the stock of his short yager rifle when it was broken off.

The stock was gone!

In the excitement of the ride it must have jolted out unnoticed, and where it was, he knew not.

Then, for the first time, the murderer trembled.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MYSTERIES.

ANNIE MCARDLE, left alone at the summit of Blowing Rock, was completely unnerved by the sudden and passionate departure of Squire. She felt that she had been doing her best for him, and that he had repaid her with ingratitude. When the elder Boone, looking pale and disturbed for the first time since she had known him, plunged down the path in hot

pursuit of his brother, and she was left entirely alone, she broke down and wept.

For a long time not a sound was heard. She cried her fill, and then rose mechanically and approached the edge of the rock. Below her lay the quiet valley of St. John's River, the tops of the trees that clung to every ledge of the precipice rising to within twenty feet of the top, and hiding the dark gulf below. At any other time Annie would have thought the view beautiful; now she was sad and forgetful, and noticed nothing.

"Why was he so hasty?" she murmured. "Could he not trust my love and his brother's? Alas, God knows what will become of us now! He will seek Yelverton, and kill him, and then will have to flee the country. Or Yelverton will kill him, and then—"

She buried her face in her hands and sobbed deeply.

Just at that moment the far-away crack of a rifle struck her ear, and she started and looked back at the path up which she had come.

A second report followed almost immediately, and then all was still as death.

Annie waited and listened anxiously for some minutes, but no new sound was heard.

And then a great terror fell upon her, as she looked around and found herself surrounded by the silent, solemn mountains.

The grand, eternal, stony calmness of those giant shapes seemed so cold and unpitying that the girl trembled and shuddered with vague apprehensions.

Some deed of blood had been committed near her in those terrible solitudes, and the unpitying mountains alone were near. Frightened and faint at heart, Annie longed for the sympathy of some living creature, and wildly ran down the path to where she had left her horse. The faithful creature was trembling itself, and welcomed her with a low whining as she hastily untied it, climbed into the saddle, and rode off.

The horse started at a lively pace, increasing momentarily, knowing that it was going home. Annie, nowise loth to be in rapid motion, felt her courage reviving as she went swiftly down among the passes, swept through the narrow gorge, and came in sight of the little lake and the hollow tree.

The valley was perfectly empty. Neither Daniel nor Squire was in sight, and Annie rode on till she came to the tree of so many memories, when she suddenly pulled her horse on his haunches with a scream of terror, and gazed at something on the ground.

It was a pool of blood.

Footsteps were all round it, leading into the woods, but Annie never thought of following them. She sat gazing spell-bound at the dark blood-pool, and then uttering a loud shriek, fled homeward from the spot like one wild with fear.

She fled past the lake side and reached Chimney Rock, went by without waiting, and galloped down the road to the valley at speed, heedless of the dangerous stumps in the way.

At one of these stumps her horse shied and nearly threw her, and then it was, as she slackened her pace from stern necessity, that she became aware of a figure in the road before her, standing some distance ahead, as if to bar her way.

Half fancying it was her enemy Yelverton, she took another look and beheld the powerful form of the elder Boone, standing statue-like, leaning on his long rifle and regarding something on the ground.

With a thrill of mingled hope and fear Annie rode up to him, and the pioneer slowly raised his head and looked her in the face.

"Annie McArdle," he said, quietly, "will ye do as I tell you and trust to me?"

"Surely I will," said Annie, trembling; "but, Mr. Boone, tell me, where is Squire? That blood I saw, those shots, what did they mean? Oh, tell me!"

"Annie McArdle," repeated the hunter, gravely, "will ye do as I tell ye and trust to me?"

"I will, indeed I will," said Annie, earnestly; "but will you not tell me what has happened?"

"Naught that you can help in," said Boone, quietly. "Go to your own home, Annie McArdle, and let not your enemy see that you suspect aught. Prepare for your wedding as if naught had happened, and leave the rest to me."

"Will you not tell me any thing?" pleaded the girl. "Is Squire hurt? Has he killed Yelverton?"

"Captain Yelverton is at the homestead," said Boone

gravely. "I am coming to your wedding to-morrow, Mistress Annie, and *I shall bring Squire with me.*"

As he spoke he drew aside out of the road to let her pass, and for the first time Annie noticed an object lying at his feet in the mud, half-hidden by a stump.

It was the silver-plated stock of a highly-ornamented rifle, broken off at the neck.

Boone noticed the direction of her eyes, and smiled gravely.

"You have found it at last," he said. "Do you know who owns it?"

Annie looked at it closely, when the borderer picked it up and handed it to her.

On one of the silver plates was engraved the name:

"Augustus Yelverton."

Boone nodded as she looked inquiringly at him.

"I will tell you all to-morrow," said the pioneer. "Would you help me now if you could, Mistress Annie?"

"Indeed I would," said she, eagerly.

"Then pass by my shanty," he said; "look in and tell Jim, Nat, and young Dan, to come here at once. Tell Rebecca I have come home, but need the boys to help carry pelts. Will ye do this for me?"

"I will," said Annie. Then she added, entreatingly:

"And will you not tell me about Squire?"

"Squire missed a shot," said the pioneer, enigmatically; "and so did I, Mistress Annie. We'll not miss to-morrow."

And with that he turned away and sat down on a stump, as if resolved not to say another word.

Annie looked at his fixed, indomitable face, usually so mild and gentle in expression. Now there was a stern, inexorable look upon that face, such as she had never seen before.

The girl felt by instinct that she could not move him. She turned away and rode sadly into the valley, pondering over what had happened to Squire.

She soon arrived at the simple cabin which held all the worldly wealth of the Boones, and as she rode up to the door was hospitably greeted by comely Rebecca Boone.

"Mrs. Boone," said Annie, hurriedly, "I have no time to stop, but I have a message to give you. Your husband is

back, and asked me to tell you to send Jim, Nat, and Dan, to meet him in the road to Chimney Rock. That's all."

And dreading to be questioned, Annie was turning away, when Mrs. Boone relieved her mind by saying, simply :

"I thank ye kindly, Miss Annie. My old man knows what he's about. Doubtless he wants the boys on man's business. I have waited two years for him, and an hour more or less makes no difference."

Then she made the clearing ring with her voice calling the lads, and Annie rode away home, just as the three stalwart young Boones picked up their rifles and started at a dog-trot toward the Chimney Rock road.

The girl rode slowly and sadly home, and almost the first person she saw in the porch was her father, along with the English captain.

Annie McArdle had hard work to restrain herself from a look of horror at the latter when she dismounted ; but Yelverton said nothing, and only bowed distantly.

Bryan McArdle was the first to speak, and he did so with a curious nervous hesitation, quite at variance with his usual manner.

"Annie, my child."

"Well, father?" This with a steady look, before which the planter's gaze fell.

"I have been talking to Captain Yelverton, Annie."

"Indeed, father?"

"And about you, child."

"What about me, sir?"

"Do you remember that to-morrow begins July, Annie?"

"I do, too well, sir."

McArdle laughed uneasily. He seemed to be acting a part which was decidedly uncongenial to him.

"You're coy, Annie. Well, girls should be that. But you should remember that our honor is involved in the performance of a pledge that you gave for to-morrow, my child.

"And what is that, father?"

"To marry Captain Yelverton."

"Father," said the girl, suddenly turning to him, "why not give up our home and go out to the wilderness to make a

fresh one? I would rather do that, than consent to buy luxury at the price of a hateful marriage."

"Child," said Bryan, trembling, "you know not what you ask. What have we to commence life with?"

"We have our own arms and hearts, and those of a hundred faithful servants," said Annie, warmly. "Let us go to the woods beyond the mountains that Daniel Boone has found, and make ourselves a new home there."

"Daniel Boone? What, is he back?" asked McArdle, hastily.

"Ay, father, and Squire with him," said Annie.

"They come too late," said Bryan, gloomily. "I had my servants, but I have them no more. Last night, in the mad hope of saving you from a match you appeared to dislike, I staked the servants against the homestead, and *lost*."

Annie turned on Yelverton with a scornful smile.

"So, then, you could not even keep your word, sir? You swore never to play cards with my father again, and now you have utterly beggared him. Well, since that is the case, I will buy him back. If you will make out a deed of gift to me of all this property, and no otherwise, I will wed you to-morrow at twelve of the clock, if we are both alive."

"Agreed," said Yelverton, with an eager snap. "It shall be done at once. I would rather take you, beautiful Miss McArdle, without a stiver of dowry, than marry a princess. On this hand I seal the vow."

And he knelt to kiss the hand that Annie shudderingly allowed him to take.

But her face was white with anger as she looked at him.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WEDDING MORN.

THE morning broke clear and fair over the peaks of the Blue Ridge, over Grandfather, Hawksbill, Black Dome, Mount Marion, and many others of lesser note. It shone upon the placid and limpid Linville, just ere it leaped into the dark gulf that swallows it up for thirteen miles; it lay red and blushing in the mirror of Watauga, and lighted up the bosom of the Yadkin.

McArdle homestead woke to life with its first rays, and thick volumes of smoke rushed from the kitchen chimney, as if great festive preparations were on foot. Long before the usual lazy hours of that careless mansion, every negro on the place was up and stirring with most unwonted zeal.

Mammy Hecuba, chief cook of the establishment, coiled in a handkerchief of fearfully brilliant hues, her fat black cheeks shining in the mingled illumination of morning light, firelight, and hearty African humor, was yet not without an underlying air of heavy responsibility.

To judge from her conversation with the chief assistant, Mammy Wenus, this responsibility was not connected with the mere preparation of breakfast.

"Go 'way, you zasperatin' chile," she said, solemnly, to the most mischievous and presuming of all her grandchildren, the very pickle and favorite of all, as the child tumbled over the threshold into the kitchen, begging for Johnnycakes. "Laws, Wenus, you dunno what 'tis to have a weddin' dinner on your mind. Dat ar' chile dar' ain't got no more notion of 'spossibility dan you has. You t'inks it's mighty easy to say, 'We'd hab turkeys at de top and geoses at de bottom, an' jellies and pies and a big plum cake.' But Laws, Wenus, who's a-goin' to tell you wedder some ob de t'ings ain't done too much by de time de folkses comes from church—and oh, Wenus, I b'lieve my heart would break into lilly bits if dat turkey was to bu'st his stuffing."

"But what's de use o' talkin' dat way, Hecuba?" expostu-

lated Venus. "Isn't I hyar to help you, and ain't Chloe and Dinah and Rachel and Juno all hyar too? How's de t'ings to burn?"

"Laws, Wenus, you dunno n' bin' 'bout it. T'ink dem fly-away gals is fit to truss wid a dinner what's gwine before a weddin'-party of all de notabilities in de land? Why gal, if 'twarn't fo' you, I 'clar' to heaben I wouldn't dar' do it at all. 'Dem gals! Chloe and de rest of dem! Shoo! Why dey'd stop de churn when de butter was comin', only to gab to each oder like young ducks; and dar' wouldn't be a t'ing on de table dat wasn't cold or burnt if *dem* was all I had to help me. No, Wenus, you and me we's got to stir round lively to-day, as soon's breakfass over."

At this minute Pompey rushed in, and exclaimed:

"Oh, Mammy Hecuba, Mammy Wenus, what you t'ink? I'se jist heerd ole marse read out all de names of de people what's comin', and it'll be de grandest weddin' whatever was seen fo' ever so long in de ole colony. Waff you t'ink! Marse Lord Baltimore he comin', and Ginerall Lee, and Marse Colonel Lenoir, and Cunnel Washington, an' Julius Caesar, and de Emperor of Chaney—and—oh, Wenus, won't it be fine?"

But Hecuba detected the lies Pompey was telling even in the utterance.

"Go 'way, you lyin' black rascal," she cried, catching up a ladle. "You want me to 'plit your skull, you ugly nigger you? T'ink I don't know whar Lord Baltimo' and Dunmo' he be, and Marse Cunnel Washington? Bah, you Pomp, you jess mean's you can be, you is. Cunnel Lenoir, he comin', and dat's all de fine folks. I knows dat."

"You knows a heap," said Pompey, scornfully, at the same time edging quietly near to a frying-pan, on which some slices of ham were frying, almost ready to take off. "I'r'aps you don't see dat carriage out dar wid de Ginerall in it."

Hecuba hurried to the window to look.

"No, I doesn't," she said, scornfully.

"No more does I," said Pompey, coolly, as he snatched a slice of ham and fled from the kitchen incontinently, pursued by the irate screams of both mammies, and laughing at their efforts to pursue him.

Hecuba, seeing it was useless to pursue him, turned on the nearest approach to a victim in the person of her youngest grandchild, Cupid. That enterprising youngster, seeing himself unheeded during the solemn conclave of the two cooks, had made his way to the egg-basket in the corner, and was enjoying himself hugely all alone, sucking eggs. In the unlucky moment of Pompey's flight, Mammy Hecuba spied Cupid, plentifully besmeared with the yolks of several eggs, cracking two more, one against the other.

Then, with all the indignation of a justly aroused cook and grandmother, Hecuba bore down on happy Cupid, and seizing him in her powerful hands, the kitchen speedily resounded with the yells of the chastised boy and the ratings of his incensed ancestress.

"You Cupid, you zasperatin' limb, didn' I tole you to leff dem eggs alone, fur de big floatin' island, you young raxal. (*Spank*.) Hasn't I got 'nuff on my min' dis blessed day, what wil de dinner and de breakfass and dat lazy (*spank*) good-for- (*spank*) noting (*spank*) Dinah, your moder, (*spank*) an' dat (*spank*) imperent Pomp, (*spank*) your fader, (*spank*) but I muss take you sarce, too?"

And here followed a battery of spanks, which terminated in Master Cupid being tumbled outside among the other children, and the half-door shut on him with a bang.

"Oh, de Laws, Wenus," then said Mammy Hecuba, plumping down on her big chair; "I'se out o' breff wid dem—"

She was interrupted by Dinah, her daughter-in-law, flying into the kitchen, with a loud:

"Wha'for you strike my chile, Mammy Hecuba? I heern you. Allers pickin' on my chile 'cause he little an' do' 'no' no better. - I gwine to tell ole marse right away, I is. You ought to be shame o' youseff."

Mother-in-law and daughter-in-law went at it hot and heavy for some minutes, with all the vigor induced by their relationship and natural jealousy. The row was fast assuming general proportions, for Mammy Wenus conceived herself bound to interfere, when a step on the stairs, a light and tripping step that told of high heels and delicate pumps, was heard, and as if by magic, the disturbance ceased.

Then, into the kitchen came the tall and slender form of

Captain Yelverton, who looked round with his usual bland smile, inquiring :

"Is it possible that I have had to ring twice, and no one heard me? Where is that exquisite youth, Pompey?"

And instantly Mammy Hecuba and Dinah, mother and wife, began to lie, to shield poor Pompey from the dreaded captain, leaving their battles to face the common enemy.

For the amiable captain, by his peculiar ways, had actually managed to strike terror into the soul of that despot of all households, the cook. *How* he had done it, Pompey could tell you, Pompey, Hecuba's favorite son, whom she scolded and loved, who played all sorts of tricks on her, and—who was Captain Yelverton's recognized property. Of his great gambling winnings, Pompey was the only part openly claimed by Yelverton, who had discovered that the lad was a universal favorite, both with McArdle and his own fellow-servants.

Now, when he asked for Pompey, Hecuba began :

"Oh, marse cappen, di'n' you know Pomp was gone to de stables? Ole marse sent him dar eber so long ago."

"Indeed?" said Yelverton, smiling so as to show all of his teeth, and looking round with glittering eyes. "So the rascal has forgotten what I told him about obeying no orders but my own. I fear I shall have to sell Pompey, mammy. Colonel Rutledge tells me he wants hands on his rice lands in Georgia. By the by, Hecuba, I have had no breakfast yet. Will you kindly send me some, at once? I hope I shall not have to part with Pompey."

And the captain turned smiling away, leaving Hecuba and Dinah alike trembling at the threat he had so gently uttered. Hecuba proceeded to dish up a bountiful breakfast, in tears all the time, and grumbling :

"Dar now, you Dinah, you see what you'se been and done, wi! you comin' down hyar, quarrelin' 'bout nothin'. You lose you Pomp, and he gwine away to dem mizzible rice lands, whar dey starve de poor niggers to deff, an' whip 'em all day long. Take up dese cakes quick, you foolish nigger."

And Dinah was too much cowed at the mischief she had done, and the softly spoken threat of the captain to find courage to reply to the scoldings of her mother-in-law, which shows that Dinah was pretty well quelled for the time.

She served the officer his breakfast up-stairs, and did her best to propitiate him during the meal by silent attentions, but when he had finished and she began timidly to speak in deprecation of the selling of Pomp, Yelverton cut her short.

"My good girl, I am not used to threaten twice. Pompey will come with Mrs. Yelverton and myself on our wedding trip. If he behaves I may bring him back. If not—why then—"

And the captain's glance spoke volumes.

What Dinah might have said is uncertain, for at that moment Annie McArdle entered the room, and Yelverton sprung up to receive her with exaggerated courtesy.

Annie's face was very pale, with a hard set expression that was very unusual with her. She bowed her head slightly to the bland greetings of the captain, and abruptly spoke :

"Has that deed been drawn up, Captain Yelverton?"

"Most certainly, fairest Miss McArdle. Did I not remain over at Lenoir's all yesterday evening till midnight while his notary was preparing it. The deed is quite ready for my signature."

"Have you signed it?"

"Why, no, not yet," said Yelverton, sweetly. "It will be signed at the same time with our marriage contract, I presume."

"I will sign nothing till that deed is delivered into my hands," said Annie, quietly; "and moreover, Captain Yelverton, I require that Dinah's husband, Pompey McArdle, be named with the other slaves. I am fully aware of your threat to sell him, as Hecuba has just told me, and, sir, if I sell myself, *I must have my price.*"

And the usually sensitive, modest Annie looked steadily into the villain's eyes with an unblenching gaze.

Yelverton returned the gaze with a long, searching look. He, too, was making discoveries. He saw that he had roused a nature deeper than his own, and that some hidden purpose was under the girl's manner. But he was not one to quarrel, when apparent yielding would serve his purpose better.

He bowed gracefully and said :

"Fairest Miss McArdle, if the sacrifice of all I had in the

world would please you, it should be done. I will do as you wish."

"I don't wish to beggar you, sir," she said, proudly. "If you are Lord Yarmouth's heir you surely must have sufficient to support your title and a wife. I only wish back the possessions of which you have deprived my father, by pandering to his passions. After that you may do what you will to me. One comfort, I can disappoint your revenge by dying."

Yelverton looked at her steadily, and then smiled.

"You keep your eyes open, madam, and you are a brave woman. Well, I have made such humble ere now. I will do your wish."

He left the room, and Annie entered the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XV.

LEGAL ADVICE.

THE morning was well advanced, things had fallen into order once more; Hecuba had recovered her tranquillity under the assurance of her young mistress that Pompey was no longer the captain's property; Annie had received and carefully examined the coveted deed, and found it perfectly honest to all appearance.

It conveyed to "Anna McArdle, spinster," all right of whatever kind, "legal, equitable, or honorable, pertaining to Augustus Yelverton, in the premises known as the McArdle homestead farm," and covered three sheets of parchment. The girl pored over it till it was time to dress, and smiled to herself as she said:

"Whatever happens, my father is safe at last."

And then came a knock at the door, with a message from her father that the wedding guests were coming.

"It was all prepared beforehand, then," she bitterly thought. "They had made up their minds that I was to be sacrificed, and have made ready the feast. No matter, I will not flinch now."

And she summoned Phoebe, her maid, and attired herself as only Annie McArdle, the heiress, of all the maidens in the Yadkin valley, could attire herself on occasion.

Meanwhile the lumbering old-fashioned coaches of colonial magnates, the McDonalds, the Lenoirs, the Norwoods, began to roll up to the front door, attended by gallantly mounted cavaliers in coats of velvet and brocade, their slender swords clattering against gilt spurs, and their snowy tie wigs or powdered hair surmounted by three-cornered laced hats.

There was a great clattering and talking down-stairs, as Bryan McArdle, magnificent in crimson velvet covered with gold lace, received his guests with the effusive hospitality of a Southern planter.

Colonel Lenoir, whose house was accounted the finest in the colony, who was moreover an art patron, and had been a regular officer in the king's service, was one of the first to come. When the rooms were full of the colony magnates, Colonel Lenoir, with his pale, highbred face, rather sad and weary looking withal, was the most distinguished figure there.

McArdle introduced him to his intended son-in-law, and was somewhat surprised that the colonel bowed coldly in answer to the obsequious salaam of the captain.

Yelverton, seeing that he had not made a favorable impression, used all the graces of manner of which he was master, to fascinate the stern, absent-looking colonel, and plunged into a conversation on military matters, relating his own exploits and adventures.

Colonel Lenoir listened politely but wearily, and finally asked a few questions, to which Yelverton replied a little at random. Then the colonel looked at him with a peculiar glance, abruptly left him, and went to talk to some one else.

Soon after the clock pointed to eleven, and McArdle began to fidget about, while Yelverton looked anxious and uneasy.

The wedding was announced for noon, and the carriages were all drawn up waiting outside. The party was to go to the church, and the church was seven miles off, so that it behoved them to start early. And yet all this time there was no sign of the bride. She kept her room, with her maid, and no bridesmaid was near her. So that first one and then another began to whisper that something was wrong.

Finally McArdle himself slipped out and was going to his daughter's room, when he met Phœbe on the stairs.

"What's the matter, Phœbe?" he asked, crossly; "is not your mistress dressed yet? It's almost time to go to church, you know."

"Misey Annie done dressed, sir, but she send me down to find Marse Colonel Lenoir to speak to um in de library, sah."

"Colonel Lenoir," said Bryan, surprised. "What does she want?"

"I'se to go and tell him Misse Annie want to see him pertikler, sah, and young Marse Billy, de counsellor."

"Well, go in there and find them," said McArdle, uneasily. "I'm sure I can't think what's the use of it, though."

And he turned away discontentedly to his guests, and told several:

"We shan't start for an hour yet. A lady's entitled to indulgence on her wedding-day, and my daughter seems inclined to take her full share. Luckily there's lunch and wine. Help yourselves."

Meanwhile Phœbe had found Colonel Lenoir and his son William, the latter a full-fledged but briefless barrister, known as a "smart" man among the mountain gentry.

Both followed her, wondering but willing, out of the crowd and down a series of corridors to the library.

This was a large, octagonal room, little used by the present McArdle, who was as much bored by books as his father had been infatuated by them, for the latter had spent half his income on books of all kinds. Colonel Lenoir, usually stately and somewhat haughty, instantly became kind, gentle, and almost fatherly in his manner when he saw Annie. As for young Lenoir, he then and there fell desperately in love with her for the space of twenty-four hours, and was ready to kill any man in the colony for her sake.

Annie McArdle, in her short, homespun gown, and Annie McArdle, rustling in the stiffest of white brocades, with a long lace veil, were chrysalis and butterfly respectively.

The girl looked adorably beautiful in her bridal dress, but her face was as pale as death, and her brown eyes looked unusually dark and large as she confronted the two Lenoirs.

The colonel looked at her for one moment, gravely and

pityingly, and then he stepped forward and took her hand, saying:

"My dear child, you are in trouble, and need help. You have chosen your old godfather to confide in, and you are right."

And he led her to a chair and sat down beside her, saying:

"Speak, child; your face tells me you have something to say. Is it about this marriage? Are you marrying willingly?"

"Yes," said Annie, faintly. "But I want to ask you a question—a legal question; William can tell me perhaps."

"Certainly," said William, briskly. "What is it, Miss Annie?"

"Does a husband take all his wife's fortune?"

"He does," said the barrister, promptly; "all her personality becomes his absolutely, the realty for his life."

"And what is personality?" she asked, innocently.

"Money, furniture, implements, cattle, slaves," said William, glibly. "Realty is land and houses. He takes that only for his life. He can't sell it."

"And supposing he gives his wife an estate before her marriage, to whom does it belong afterward?" she asked.

"To her husband, unless he stipulates to the contrary in the papers and marriage settlements."

Annie drew a long, anxious breath.

"Will you please read this, and tell me if this is a settlement?"

And she handed the deed across the table to young Lenoir.

Then she placed her hand in that of her kind old godfather, and the two awaited silently the lawyer's verdict.

Presently William looked up.

"This is an absolute transfer of all interest held by Augustus Yelverton in this homestead. It will be worthless when you are married to him."

"But is the property mine now?" she asked, eagerly.

William smiled.

"As much so as he can make it. It is your father's, already."

"Was, not is," said Annie, sadly. "Godfather, William,

my father lost every penny to this man when gambling, and he holds my father's deed to him of every thing."

William uttered a low whistle. The colonel was silent.

After a pause, William said :

"And what do you wish to do, Miss Annie?"

"I wish now, before I am married, to give back this property to my father, so that Captain Yelverton can not touch it, because I know him to be a villain."

Colonel Lenoir pressed her hand softly.

"Then why marry him, my child? You are not bound to assume lifelong misery to save your father from the consequences of his own folly."

Annie turned round.

"Colonel Lenoir, I know it; but I can not see *him* turned out to starve. I have sold myself to save him. But—I have given my word."

The colonel bowed his head.

"Ah, then—you must keep it."

Annie smiled sadly.

"I knew you were a man of honor. Well, then, will you help me to make this villain give back my father his own? Let me not be cheated *after I have paid the price!*"

"You shall not," said the colonel, gravely, rising. "I will not say, young lady, what I think of your conduct. You are a noble girl, and were I a young man, I would cut this knot with the true weapon in such a case. As it is, William, you must help her."

But William's pen was already traveling over the foot of the parchment, and had been during their brief conversation.

"It is finished, Miss Annie—'I hereby transfer all interest in the above deed to Bryan McArdle and his heirs forever.' Sign it, and my father and I will witness it. Then the devil himself can't take it from your father."

And the hasty young lawyer showed her the place to sign, shoved over the paper to the colonel, who affixed his own sign manual, and then dashed down "William Norwood Lenoir" in characters of portentous size.

That done, he folded up the deed, thrust it into his breast, and spoke to his father, with the punctilious courtesy of the day :

"Colonel Lenoir and my dear father, may I crave your permission to challenge a scoundrel that hath insulted a lady friend of mine?"

The colonel rose and confronted his son, with a proud light shining in his eye, and his voice trembled as he said:

"I grieve to say, sir, that I can not afford the permission. I know this man, *and he is not what he seems.*"

"Not what he seems!" echoed Annie, incredulously. "Who and what is he, then?"

"I know the man's face well," said Lenoir, quietly. "He is an old fencing-master to the guards, and was driven out of London ten years ago for wearing a cuirass under his shirt in a duel. I can not trust you to fight him, William, simply because I intend *to kill him myself.*"

Annie was about to interpose, frightened at the thought of bloodshed, when there was a hurried knock at the door, and Phoebe looked in.

"Oh, please, Missy Annie, ole marse and marse cappen fly-in' 'roun' like to tear dem shirts. Dar's two hunter-men from de mountains come in, and one of dem's ole Marse Dan'l Boone. And dem's goin' on awful, missy—"

But here Annie jumped up, full of excitement, crying:

"Saved! saved! Oh, godfather, I thought he would never come!"

And then she swept quickly out of the room, followed by both Lenoirs, and once in the corridor, subsided into stately grace.

Into the great drawing-room she sailed, on Colonel Lenoir's arm, and the first thing she saw was the plain, homely figure of the great pioneer-hunter, leaning on his rifle, in the midst of an angry crowd of gentlemen, while Yelverton was gesticulating violently, opposite.

As she entered, Boone drew up to his full height, grounded the butt of his rifle, and spoke in a loud, clear voice:

"No need to talk so fast, gentlemen. There ain't no back-down to me. Hyar's the young lady herself, and we kin settle this little matter 'twixt Cap and me in a jiffy, without frightening her. Miss Annie, I have come, as I promised."

CHAPTER XVI.

CONFLICTING EVIDENCE.

AND then it was that Annie looked eagerly round, and saw no one but young Nathan Boone, the hunter's eldest son, and she asked, in a tremulous voice:

"And Squire, where is he, Mr. Boone?"

Daniel Boone stepped up close to the splendid beauty and asked, in a low tone:

"Will ye trust me, whatever I say, for ten minutes, Annie?"

She bowed her head; she could not speak.

Then Daniel Boone turned to face the assembled company, who had hushed since the entrance of the bride and Colonel Lenoir.

He pointed straight at Yelverton, who was confronting him with a pale, dangerous-looking face, and said, aloud:

"Thar stands the man that shot him down yesterday from his hiding-place on Chimney Rock."

"You lie!" said Yelverton, promptly.

Then there was a general shiver among the company, for the lie never passed there without a following of blood.

Daniel Boone only smiled.

"I'll attend to that little matter presently," he said. "Jeet now, thar's other business on hand."

"And do you mean to say, Mr. McArdle," cried the captain, furiously, "that you'll allow this low-bred fellow to come in here and disturb my wedding-party with his low accusations? Gentlemen, let's turn him out."

No one stirred, and Boone laughed shortly.

"You see, people know me hyar, Cap," he said. "Hyar's Cannel Lenoir, who's hunted with me many a time, and knows if I'm given to lyin'."

"Let us make an end of this," said Yelverton, savagely. "What do you come here for? Speak quick."

"To kill you," said Boone, quietly; "thar's one thag"

There was such a softness of accent in the words, they were spoken with such serene indifference, that their effect was doubly great.

Yelverton started, and for a moment you might have heard a pin drop, while the captain stared at Boone.

Then the hunter continued, in a more emphatic voice :

"And to show these gentlemen who's the liar and cheat. Cunnel Lenoir, Cunnel McArdle, will you too see fair play here?"

Before Yelverton could speak Lenoir's voice was heard :

"Friend Boone, you have disturbed a friendly meeting, but, as all here know, you are not a man given to vain talking. What do you wish to say against this—this gentleman? What do you accuse him of, and where are your proofs?"

"I accuse him of two things," said Boone, slowly. "First, of cheating Cunnel McArdle at cards."

There was a general exclamation here. Bryan McArdle himself hastily cried out :

"When, when, where? What do you mean?"

"The night before last," said the hunter, slowly. "It was in the captain's bed-room, when he and you were playin' some game. You sat facin' the window, he had his back to it. I saw him change cards out of his sleeve into the pack, and into his hand twice over. And, what's more, he cleaned you out."

Here Yelverton, who had been growing paler momentarily dashed at Boone, whipping out his sword, and hissed out :

"Liar, knave, I'll teach you."

But the pioneer was quicker than any of those who hurriedly interposed to save him.

In an instant his rifle was up, butt foremost, and he dealt the gambler a lunge in the breast with the heavy weapon that sent him reeling back gasping. In another instant Yelverton was disarmed by several bystanders, and Daniel quietly observed :

"Keep cool, Cap. We'll settle our business first. After ward we'll see about them little names."

"Friend Boone, I want your rifle," here said Colonel Lenoir, in his cold, calm tones. "When such talk as this goes on, we must see things are carried through in quiet, till the proper time comes. You forget that a lady is present."

"Hyar's the rifle, cunnel," said Boone, coolly. "I ask the lady's pardon, but as I'm actin' in her interest, I reckon she'll forgive me."

"Oh, yes, yes," said Annie, in a low tone; "but pray go on."

"You accuse Captain Yelverton of cheating at cards. What proof do you bring?" asked Lenoir.

"I saw him myself," said the pioneer, slowly.

"How, where?" asked McArdle, excitedly. "Where were you?"

Boone laughed.

Wal, cunnel, I war whar I'd no business to be I s'pose, up the old tree over your spring-house, lookin' in at the winder. But old Sweetlips and Chanticleer they hadn't forgot me, though I've b'en away to the woods fur two year, and they said I mout go up, ef I wanted ter. Yer see, cunnel, your darter and my brother Squire were sweet on one another, as you know, afore this here—this here—captain came with his fine clothes to win away your money and Squire's gal. And Miss Annie, seein' how things war goin', she sent Squire arter me to get me to help sarcumvent the cutter. You promised 'em once, cunnel, that Squire should have Annie, if he could take her to a farm as big as this. Wal, I've found him a place whar he can have a plantation ten times as big for nothing. But as I was saying, Miss Annie, not wantin' to marry this here—captain—sent for me, and I come night afore last, to let her know I was around. I left a token on the tree, and then, seein' a light at this here—captain's—winder, I went up the tree to see what was goin' on. 'Thar I saw—what I've told—this here—captain—cheatin' at cards."

There was a short silence throughout the room, and then Bryan McArdle addressed Yelverton:

"Yelverton, is this true?"

"No, I deny it totally," said the captain, who had been collecting his energies during the pioneer's story. "It's a lying invention of that man, who confesses himself an eaves-dropper, to benefit his lazy brother, who wants to aspire to the heiress of the valley. The thing is a transparent lie in itself. You know, Mac, whether I ever asked you to play with me. I got the best of you fairly on your own invita-

tion; I gave you back your property once; still you would gamble. To-day I gave it back again to your daughter. Now, not satisfied with that, you want to trump up a charge of cheating against me, on the testimony of a common hunter. It's simply a transparent outrage on decency."

Again there was a short silence, for Bryan McArdle felt the force of Yelverton's words. Then Colonel Lenoir said:

"Word against word, gentlemen, I would believe Daniel Boone against any man I know. But let it pass. I shall have a word to say about Captain—Yelverton—in time. Friend Boone, what's your next accusation?"

"I accuse this—captain—of shooting my brother from behind the Chimney Rock yesterday—willful murder they call it in your law," and Daniel Boone looked sternly at the captain.

"Your witness?" said Lenoir, coldly.

"I saw him fire the shot, I saw him rise up, I saw him flee, I found his trail on the road, he broke his rifle in coming down, I found the stock on the road, *and here it is.*"

As the hunter concluded he held up the broken stock of Yelverton's rifle, drawing it from beneath his hunting-shirt, and handed it to Colonel Lenoir.

The latter read the name on the plate and asked:

"Your brother, was he killed?"

"By the mercy of God, no," said Boone, piously. "He was sorely wounded, but he will recover."

Here Annie interrupted him, reproachfully:

"Oh, Mr. Boone, and you would not tell me that. Oh, where is he? Is he hurt badly? Are you deceiving me?"

Boone turned to his son, Nathan, who had stood silent, leaning on his rifle, all this time.

"Nat, go and bring in the boys and Squire. Miss Annie, you shall see him with your own eyes."

Then turning to Lenoir, he said, as Nathan departed:

"What think ye now, cunnel?"

Lenoir turned to Yelverton.

"What say you to this charge, sir?"

Yelverton was quite calm, now. The danger was too great for him to show any more temper.

"I say this, colonel. Yesterday I was out shooting at

target, and when I had shot away all my bullets but one, I was sauntering home by the Chimney Rock road, when I was fired at by this fellow here, who missed my heart by a chance, but sent the ball through my clothes. I can show you the bullet holes. Afraid of my life, I hastily turned and fired at two men I saw aiming at me. One of them fell. It was this fellow's brother; I am glad of it. I am only sorry 'twas not himself, too. But I was left defenseless, and they had a loaded rifle yet. Therefore, I fled, and, in fleeing, broke my rifle. That is all."

"A serious discrepancy," said Lenoir, gravely. "Boone, did you shoot at him?"

"I did, cunnel."

"And why?"

"Because, as I told ye, he had just shot at Squire from a rest on the top of the Chimney Rock. I saw my brother fall, the captain rise, and I took a hasty shot at a quarter of a mile off. Cunnel, I'm well ashamed to think o' that shot. *I didn't drop him*. It riles me now to think of it. My narves war flastered, thar's no denyin' it, but a hunter hain't no business to have narves. Seein' yer brother killed afore yer eyes ain't calculate'd to steady them, but I ought to have known better than to miss my mark. Cannel and gentlemen, I apologize fur that shot, but I reckon I kin better it to-day."

In spite of the grave surroundings, there was a perceptible smile on the faces of all present, at the quaint explanation of the hunter.

The sound of feet was heard at the door, and Nathan Boone, with his three brothers, entered, bearing on a rude litter the form of Squire Boone.

Squire's face was ghastly pale, and Annie shrieked as she saw him, for his left arm lay helpless beside him, and his left shoulder was bound up. She was rushing forward to his side when Lenoir laid his hand on her arm and said:

"A moment, I pray you, my child. Squire Boone, as God is above us, tell the truth. Who shot you and how did it happen?"

"I was going toward Chimney Rock, colonel, to find Captain Yelverton, and challenge him to mortal fight, when some one shot me here" (pointing to his breast), "and I fell senseless.

When I came to, Daniel and the lads were carrying me home, and that is all I know. I did not see the man who shot me."

"Did you fire at all?" asked Lenoir.

"I did not, sir; but I'll not say but what I should, had I met the captain fairly."

"Of course," said Yelverton, with a sneer. "They stick together, these Boones. Well, then, gentlemen, it is a simple conflict of veracity between myself and this hunter. I am a gentleman and he is a ruffian, but I will waive all that. I pronounce this Daniel Boone a perjured liar, and challenge him to instant combat before this door with the weapon he is so proud of, the rifle. Let God decide between us."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DUEL.

THERE was a dead silence throughout the room, and then Colonel Lenoir asked:

"Are you willing to let it stand so, friend Boone? You have a right to decline and let this matter go before the courts."

The pioneer had been standing with his arms folded by his brother's litter, listening silently to all that passed. Now he looked up, and his usually mild countenance wore the exceptionally stern look it sometimes assumed.

"I ain't much used to the law, cunnel," he said, slowly; "and it's mighty poor justice, from all I've seen of it. Wood law and rifle justice is what I'm most used to. I hain't called that—captain, thar—any names, that I know of, and he's given me the lie three times before a lady. He's called me low-born, and sichlike, and you know, cunnel, if I ain't good enough to consort with gentlemen. Hyar, in the mountains, we don't measure a gentleman by his velvet coats. If he's a gentleman, he never lies, and scorns to steal. Cunnel, do you call me a gentleman or not?"

"I am proud to be numbered among your friends, Boone and I am not given to make friends save with gentlemen," was the instant reply of Lenoir.

"Then when gentlemen give each other the lie," said Boone, calmly, "one of the two has got to die."

"Will you fight me, then?" cried Yelverton, eagerly.

"Sartin I will," said the pioneer, coolly. "That's what I came hyar for."

"Let us go out," cried the gambler, fiercely. "I'll show this boasted marksman that an English nobleman can outshoot a low mountain pot hunter at his own weapons."

And he was starting for the door, calling:

"My ritle, Pompey, quick."

Boone's quiet but powerful voice arrested him.

"Capt. Yelverton, ye'd better choose some other weapon."

"And why?" asked the gambler, fiercely, pausing a moment.

"Because ye hain't fired at a target with a loaded rifle in the bull's eye, p'intin' at ye. That's all," said the hunter.

"I take the risk. Come on."

And in a moment more the whole of the company, except Annie and Squire, had streamed out of the house, leaving the reunited lovers alone together.

"Oh, Squire, dearest, dearest one, had you only been less rash, how happy we might be," said Annie, weeping beside him.

"We shall be happy yet," answered the youth. "I am not badly hurt, Annie, and the doctor says I shall soon get well. But he who parted us, Annie, is gone to his doom, for Daniel is angry at last; and when that happens, Annie, he never spares. Before the hour of noon, when ye were to keep your promise and wed him, Yelverton will be past all marrying and praying for. Daniel promised me, and he keeps his word."

Out on the green turf, in front of the McArdle mansion, a crowd of gentlemen bustled to and fro measuring distances, settling vexed questions of light and ground, and comparing weapons.

Boone stood apart like a statue, as if quite indifferent to

the proceedings. When Lenoir informed him that the choice of weapons and distance lay with him, he said:

"Give Cap the choice, cunnel. I kin throw him at any hold he takes. Give him his chances."

And at last it was settled that they were to stand forty paces apart, and that the words "Ready," "Present," "Fire," were to be given by Colonel Lenoir, when each party was to be at liberty to take his own time, so long as he did not shoot *before* the word.

Then the company gathered to one side, Lenoir handed each combatant his own rifle, and took his position to give the word.

Boone carelessly took his rifle, grounded the butt and stood calmly erect, facing his antagonist.

Yelverton, on the contrary, examined his own rifle, a short yager piece of the same pattern as the one with which he had shot Squire the day before, with the utmost care. He waited feverishly for the word, and but for the numerous witnesses around, it is possible that he might have fired before it was given.

As it was, he was ready the moment Lenoir spoke, and at the word "Present" he took a steady aim at the hunter.

Daniel, on the contrary, only cocked his rifle and waited.

"Fire!" said Lenoir, in his deep voice.

At the word Yelverton's rifle exploded, and the hunter's cap was knocked from his head, while the bullet slapped up into the kitchen chimney behind him.

"It's a different thing shootin' at a target and a loaded rifle, Cap," said Boone, coolly. "Ye meant that for my head. Very well, I mean this for your hat."

As he spoke, he rapidly raised his rifle, fired with but a momentary aim, and Yelverton's hat flew from his head, while the captain started back with an involuntary cry, for the bullet had grazed his scalp with the sensation of a blow.

Boone threw down his rifle.

"I told ye not to choose rifles, Cap," he said, carelessly. "Try something else. A Southern gentleman will always fight with his enemy's best weapon."

"Will you finish with swords?" asked Yelverton, hoarsely. He was very pale now, and his eyes showed a new-born

respect for his adversary, whom he had underrated before.

"Any thing you like," said the hunter, grimly. "I could have killed ye jest now, and I spared ye. Confess your lies and I'll give ye your life now. If not, bring on your swords, and I'll spare ye no more."

"The swords, the swords!" cried Yelverton, eagerly.

But here, to the surprise of all, Colonel Lenoir interrupted

"This must not be, gentlemen, all. I know this man, who calls himself Captain Yelverton. He is no captain, but a fencing-master in the Guards, who was compelled to leave London for murdering a young nobleman in a duel. A cuirass was discovered under his shirt, by Lord Yarmouth's sword breaking on it, and he stabbed Yarmouth, and managed to escape. Gentlemen, I pronounce that man the notorious murderer, Fitzgerald, and I'll not stand by and see this gentleman fight a master of the sword, when he himself has never handled one."

There was a universal cry of surprise and indignation, in the midst of which Yelverton shrieked:

"Lenoir, you lie, do you hear? Search me, all of you, gentlemen, and see if I wear armor. I'll kill this hunter, first, and you next, Lenoir, for you're a lying coward."

Lenoir's hot blood rose in a moment.

"Give him a sword, some one," he cried. "I'm no bungler, Fitzgerald, and I'll show you that now."

But here Boone suddenly developed a new character.

"The man that touches my foe must settle with me, gentlemen," he shouted, exerting his stentorian voice for the first time. "Swords or rifles, 'tis all one. Counsel Lenoir, keep out of my way. I don't want to hurt an old friend. Give me these swords, and I'll show you the Old North Colony can't be beat so easy."

The younger gentlemen cheered the rough hunter lustily, and a dozen swords were proffered him in a moment.

He took two of the slender weapons and balanced them in his hand with a strange expression of contempt and grim jocularitv.

"Why, gentlemen, ye don't say ye kin kill a man with these toys. Why I'd as lief draw my old rammer and try to kill

a buffer with it. How do ye kill 'em with these things, cunnel?"

"For God's sake, Boone, let me show you," said Lenoir, earnestly, while Yelverton stood scornfully laughing. "If he kills me, you can avenge me, but I can't see you murdered. He'll run you through the body as quick as you'd stab a deer in the throat.

"Oh-h!" said Boone, with a long, comical drawl; "so that's the way they do it, cunnel. "Wal, 'tain't nothing to do that, for I never saw the Injun I was afeerd of with a knife, and them's long knives. Hyar Cap, take yer sticker; and you, gentlemen, stand clear. 'Thar's goin' to be a fight."

He advanced to Yelverton and proffered him the two swords, one of which the captain took with a disdainful smile, and then threw off his upper garments.

"Now, gentlemen," said Yelverton, "I insist on being searched, since Colonel Lenoir has been pleased to connect my name with that of a person who unhappily resembles me in the face. For that insult, he shall answer to me presently, but now, *search me.*"

In grave silence he was searched and pronounced all right and then Boone, who had been a puzzled spectator of the ceremony, observed:

"Ye needn't have done it, gentlemen. Cap's a brave man if he is a—well—never mind—take keer of yourself, Cap."

As he spoke they were at opposite sides of a ring of spectators. The hunter threw away the knife from his belt, and marched on Yelverton sword in hand, in a manner that clearly revealed his entire ignorance of fencing.

The gambler, on the contrary, threw himself into a position of perfect grace, on guard, his body swaying lightly back and forth, his point directed at Boone, his left hand raised to poise, a confident smile on his face.

The hunter's broad chest was fully exposed to the thrust, for his left foot was foremost, his left arm in front, as if for a shield, while his right hand was down by his hip, holding the sword sloping upward.

Then Yelverton started forward to meet Boone in the regular scientific advance of an expert fencer.

The hunter moved slowly toward him, warily enough in

his peculiar manner, half crouching forward as he went. In a moment they were within distance, and Yelverton lunged straight at the hunter with all his vicious spite in the act. In the same instant the swords clashed, as Boone threw up his own blade and with it Yelverton's point; with a single rapid clutch of his iron left hand he seized the duelist's blade close to the hilt, wrenched it out of his grasp like a toy, and dashed his own point like a flash through the other's body, till the guard struck against his breast bone with a thud heard all over the ground.

Yelverton fell writhing to the earth, with an unconquerable cry of intense agony, and the hunter threw down the sword he had wrenched away.

"Cunnel, I see ye *can* kill a man with those things," was all he said, and then he turned away.

Lenoir approached the unhappy captain, who was still writhing in fearful pain, crying out:

"Oh, Christ, water, water; for the love of God, pluck out this sword and give me water. Ah, curse the clumsy bumpkin! To think that I should die thus, killed by a fellow that never handled a sword before. Oh, Lenoir, had it been only you, I wouldn't mind, for you're a gentleman; but that cursed Boone—"

And then the agony overcame him, and he shrieked for help and water. Lenoir, with a grave, pitying face, himself plucked out the sword, and held the water to his lips, which the poor wretch swallowed eagerly, the blood pouring from his back all the while. Then he turned very weak and lay back on the grass.

"Lenoir," he whispered, "I'm dying. 'Tis all true as you said. I am he whom they once called "Fighting Fitzgerald." God forgive me! I'm punished for killing Yarmouth now. Send for a priest. You don't want to send me to hell as well as kill me? I must confess."

Lenoir knelt down beside him.

"Fitzgerald," he said, gravely, "the nearest priest of your persuasion is twenty miles off. Before he can come you will be a corpse. Man, think that you are about to meet your God and own the truth before your fellow-men. Did the hunter accuse you truly?"

"He did, he did," groaned the false Yelverton. "I did cheat Mr. McArdle at cards and I shot young Boone as he said; but oh, Lenoir, I did it all for love of her, Annie, and now I have lost her forever. She will execrate my memory."

"Would it make your mind any easier were she to tell you she forgave you?" asked the colonel.

"Alas, she never will," said the poor wretch, piteously. "I made my bed and I must lie on it."

By this time a circle of grave faces surrounded the two, and the eyes of Fitzgerald, looking up, encountered the gaze of Bryan McArdle.

"You too," he said, with a sigh, "you never would forgive me, for I was merciless to you, and led you on to ruin. Never mind, Mac; I'm going away now, and I shall never play basset again."

Bryan McArdle held out his hand.

"Before God, Yelverton," he said, "I acquit you of my ruin. You may have cheated me, but I will bear witness you never proposed to me to play. I have my own mad passion for gambling to answer for. It has brought you to this."

Then Lenoir spoke in his deep, serious tones:

"Bryan, the blood here spilt will not be wholly lost if you will give your word of honor to God Almighty and these gentlemen present, never to gamble again. Will you do it?"

"I call God and you to witness," said the planter, solemnly, "that I will never play a card again. Would to God I never had."

Fitzgerald smiled faintly.

"You are all very good to me," he murmured. "You stand by me like friends, and not one curses me. Where is the man who stabbed me? I owe him an apology for insulting him."

Some one said:

"He has gone."

Then they looked round and beheld a strange sight.

Daniel Boone in his rough woodland dress, and Annie McArdle in her snowy bridal robes, one on each side, were assisting the tottering steps of Squire from the house.

The young woodsman, pale and bandaged, supported by

the stalwart pioneer and the delicate, beautiful maiden, was coming slowly toward the wounded man, who was evidently sinking fast, although his voice was still wonderfully strong.

Every one made way for them, and very soon Squire and the gambler were face to face.

Fitzgerald smiled with a painful effort.

"You're come to triumph over me, young Boone. Well, well, it was a better man than you who killed me. But you told the odd trick, and I suppose the game's yours. Glory in it while you may. I shall not see you long."

He sullenly closed his eyes.

Then said Squire :

"God knows, captain, that I came for no triumph. I tried to find ye yesterday to shoot ye, and I lost the luck. But I came to tell you that I forgive the shot ; for I know how hard it is to lose Annie."

"And I came to tell you, poor lost man, that I forgive you all," said the soft voice of Annie McArdle. "Daniel Boone has just told me how you longed to see me, and indeed, Yelverton, I freely forgive you all."

Fitzgerald opened his eyes and looked at her.

"Did Daniel Boone tell you, and bring you here?"

"He did, indeed."

"Will you let me kiss your hand ere I die?" he asked, in an altered tone of voice.

"Surely I will."

And Annie extended her hand to him with a pitying face.

The dying gambler pressed it to his lips in a fervent kiss, and murmured :

"God bless you and forgive me. May you be happy."

He closed his eyes and relinquished the hand, while a spasm of pain crossed his features and he lay still.

Presently, in a clear voice he said :

"Lenoir, raise me up. I want to speak my last words."

Then when they had raised him, he turned to Daniel Boone and said distinctly :

"Mr. Boone, I insulted you without cause and you have punished me justly. Sir, I apologize."

And he fell back dead.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

NOT long after the events recorded in our tale there was a real grand wedding at the McArdle mansion. Squire Boone, the young hunter, recovered from his wound, was the bridegroom, and sweet Annie McArdle the bride.

William Lenoir, resplendent in velvets, was best-man to the young hunter, and Bryan McArdle gave his blessing to the bride. And yet his Annie was going to leave him and go on distant and dangerous travels with her husband, for Squire it was who was chosen as the guide for the expedition about to start for the promised land of Kentucky under Daniel's auspices.

Squire it was who knew the only roads practicable for wagons, and Squire it was who was to locate himself a farm to which Bryan had promised to move all his worldly goods, slaves and cattle, when his young son-in-law should send him word.

The history of that expedition is well known and its ultimate success. How the sturdy Carolinians and Virginians crossed the mountains and peopled the wilderness, how they fought savages and Tories alike, to keep the heritage Daniel had found for them, is it not written in History?

To those who have followed this plain and simple story, which represents the great Boone as he really was, and as he himself recorded with his own hand, "an instrument ordained to people the wilderness," it may serve to correct some of the theatrical and false accounts given elsewhere of one of the simplest and grandest figures in the story of American civilization.

To these we would say the main incidents and names here treated of, are historically true, and that Daniel Boone was by no means the hater of his kind and solitary misanthrope he has been often represented to be.

As we have painted him, a serious, earnest man, loving

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Hezekiah Dawson on	parody,	de sun,	Muldoon's,
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lin's kite,	The pill peddler's ora-	Our candidate's views,	An invitation to
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